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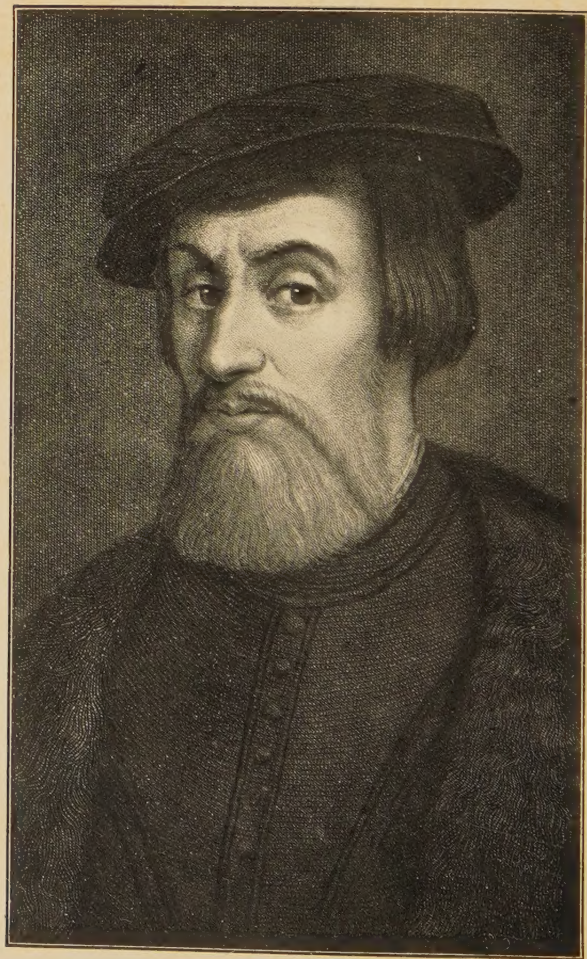
HEROES OF  
AMERICAN HISTORY

CORTÉS









HERNANDO CORTÉS

# HERNANDO CORTÉS

CONQUEROR OF MEXICO

BY  
FREDERICK A. OBER

HEROES OF AMERICAN HISTORY



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# HERNANDO CORTÉS

## I

IN SPAIN AND HISPANIOLA

1485-1511

AT the beginning of the sixteenth century, the youth of Spain had become inspired with the hope, if not the belief, that wealth and honors awaited them in the West Indies, and what more natural than that many of them should wish to try their fortunes there? Among those who looked towards the Occident for the betterment of their birthrights was the boy who, as a man, became the conqueror of Mexico, Hernando Cortés. He was born to poverty, but could boast descent from most distinguished ancestry, as the son of a retired captain of the Spanish army, Don Martin Cortés de Monroy, and his worthy wife, Doña Catalina Pizarro Altamirano.

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Hernando Cortés was seven years old when America was discovered by Columbus. Unlike the great navigator who revealed a new continent to Europe, he was a native of Spain, and inland born. His eyes first opened to the light in the mountain hamlet of Medellin, in Estremadura, which is scarcely better known to-day than it was in that far-distant time when the event occurred which constitutes almost its only claim to fame.

Very little is known of his youth, but at the age of fourteen he might have been found in the famous university of Salamanca, whence, although his parents indulged in great expectations for their precocious son, he eventually returned to his home, without having accomplished anything at all to his credit, except "the writing of Latin, prose and verse, indifferently well."

As to entering the profession of the law, for which his fond parents had hoped he would equip himself, he had no such intentions, but, rather, inclined to that of arms. When, therefore, at about the age of seventeen, he proposed enlisting in the army for Italy, commanded by the *Gran Capitan*, or Great Captain, Gonsalvo de Cordova, his father

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and mother freely gave their consent. They were, in truth, inclined to the belief that, after all, military training, and especially its discipline, might be good for the wayward boy, whose midnight and other adventures were already the talk of the town.

He felt within him the craving for a life of adventure, whether military or otherwise, and in the end decided that the newly discovered regions in the Western World held more of promise in this direction than the well-trodden fields of the Old World, even under that glorious commander, the *Gran Capitan*.

His native hamlet of Medellin was distant from Seville, and from Palos, whence Columbus had first sailed, only a two-days' journey, and young Hernando had doubtless met and conversed with more than one mariner who had made the great Atlantic voyage. He resolved, at all events, to go to America, and secured permission to sail with Don Nicolas de Ovando, who had been appointed the royal commissioner at Hispaniola, as successor to Columbus and Bovadilla in the governorship of that island.

During the first decade of the sixteenth century, and well into the second, the island



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of Haiti, or Hispaniola (discovered by Columbus in 1492), and the second city founded there, called Santo Domingo, were objects of absorbing interest to all Spain.

By a freak of fortune not uncommon in those days, the brothers Columbus (Christopher, Bartholomew, and Diego) fell into disfavor with the Spanish sovereigns, and a royal commissioner was sent out to investigate their conduct. This person was Don Francisco de Bovadilla, an obscure knight of Calatrava. His head was turned by his sudden elevation to power and prominence, and he so far exceeded the instructions of Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand as to seize the properties of the three brothers and cast them into prison.

Columbus, the great discoverer, the Spanish sovereigns' own "Admiral of the Ocean Sea" (to whom they were indebted for all that was embraced in the term America), was not only imprisoned, but placed in chains. The fettered Columbus was returned to Spain in the year 1500, and within two years, or on February 13, 1502, Don Nicolas de Ovando sailed for Santo Domingo, bearing a warrant to displace the great admiral's immediate successor.

## IN SPAIN AND HISPANIOLA

Don Nicolas, himself a native of Estremadura, was acquainted with young Cortés, and seemed to like him, so the occasion appeared most propitious; but, unfortunately, the lad's inclination for rash adventures led him into difficulty at the very time Ovando's armament was being prepared, and delayed his departure for the New World by at least two years.

Young as he was at this time, Hernando showed himself possessed of a love for intrigue, which proved so detrimental to his fortunes later in life. Going out one night, "to speak with a lady," he fell from a high wall he was scaling in the dark, and received such injuries that he was still confined to his bed when Ovando's fleet sailed for America.

As this fleet of thirty-five sail was the largest that had yet sought the shores of distant America, and as it was commanded (in effect) by one well disposed to the recreant youth, it would seem that young Cortés had lost, by giving rein to indulgence, a golden opportunity. His chagrin was great, and, that of his parents being yet greater, he took the first occasion presenting after his recovery to leave Medellin for Valencia, with a view of carrying out his original intention,

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of enlisting under the Great Captain for the wars in Italy. But the critical moment found him ill again, and, after a year of extreme poverty and hard usage in Valencia, he returned home, humbled and penitent.

Expeditions from Spain to the New World were relatively numerous in those days, and when, in 1504, Cortés learned that a fleet was fitting out at San Lucar, bound for Santo Domingo, he hastened to secure a passage. He was furnished by his father with just sufficient money, from his scant savings, and given the paternal blessing. For the latter, the heartless Hernando little cared (it is said), nor recked he that his means were small; for he then had health, good looks, abundant wit, an audacious manner, and great flow of spirits, all which made him a universal favorite.

The voyage was an unfortunate one for all concerned, the vessel in which he took passage having been blown out of her course, dismasted, buffeted by adverse winds, and nearly wrecked by tempests. When finally landed at Santo Domingo, Cortés jauntily betook himself to the governor's house, confident that his many merits would be promptly recognized.

## IN SPAIN AND HISPANIOLA

Governor Ovando was away on an Indian-hunting expedition, the natives of Higüey, the easternmost province of Hispaniola, having risen in rebellion, because one of their caciques had been torn to pieces by Spanish blood-hounds. Hunting the Indians with blood-hounds was a pastime in which Ovando frequently indulged, for he was the most cruel of all the governors sent out to Hispaniola.

After running the rebellious Indians to earth, hanging their last great cacique (or chief), Cotubanama, and cutting off the hands of many red-skinned rebels, Governor Ovando finally returned to the capital. He was in great spirits (having at last overcome the worst of the rebels), and when Hernando Cortés preferred his request—for an estate in the gold region and a license to mine the precious metal—he was not disappointed. Ovando's secretary had previously assured him that he should have a grant of land, with an *encomienda* <sup>1</sup> of Indians to till it; but the proud hidalgo had retorted: "Señor Secretario, know you that I came here to

<sup>1</sup> *Encomienda*—ain-co-me-ain'-da: in this sense a body of laborers, practically slaves, going with a grant of land.

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*get gold*, and not to cultivate the soil like a peasant!"

Finding, however, that the gold-mines were nearly exhausted, and that the poor Indians were a free gift, going with the soil in *repartimientos* (or apportionments), this youth of nineteen, who had no other fortune than his sword, graciously consented to receive them. He finally settled down as a planter and slave-driver, and also received an appointment as notary in the town of Azua. This town was founded that very year, 1504, by one of Ovando's most energetic lieutenants, Diego Velasquez, of whom we shall hear more anon.

It is probable that Cortés accompanied Velasquez to the site of the settlement and assisted at its birth, though his friend had visited the section before. It was the year before, in 1503, that Ovando, under pretence that the natives of Xaragua, the southwestern province of Hispaniola, were meditating a revolt, marched upon them with an army. While he was the honored guest of Queen Anacaona and her chiefs (who had assembled, at his request, for consultation), Ovando gave the order that resulted in such a slaughter of the inoffensive Indians



## IN SPAIN AND HISPANIOLA

that very few of them were left alive. Thousands were butchered in the plaza of the Indian town, forty caciques were either hanged or burned alive, while women, babes, and children were murdered in cold blood. The artless and innocent Anacaona was taken to Santo Domingo, where, after a pretence of trial, she was hanged in the plaza of the capital and her remains thrown to the dogs.

Diego Velasquez was one of that band of assassins which had committed the massacre, for it was known that he guarded one of the huts containing the caciques who were burned alive, and afterwards assisted at the hangings. His character may be implied from acts like these, which he was prone to commit with little provocation; and the subsequent career of Hernando Cortés furnishes abundant proof that he profited by his companion's teachings.

Cortés and Velasquez were thrown much together, and, so far as the scant records inform us, became almost inseparable companions, buried as they were in that lonely settlement, nearly one hundred miles from the capital city. You will find Azua, to-day, a miserable hamlet, on the south coast

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of the island, occupied mainly by colored people. Though it was founded four hundred years ago, it can boast no important structures, as it has been several times shaken to pieces by earthquakes and burned by revolutionists. In the Bay of Ocoa (a few miles from which Azua is situated) Columbus sought shelter from a hurricane that destroyed Bovadilla's fleet, in the year 1502, and which he had accurately predicted. It is probable that when the aged admiral returned to Santo Domingo, from his disastrous voyage to Jamaica, Cortés may have seen him there, for it was in the summer of 1504. Thus Hernando Cortés forms a link in the human chain connecting the discoverers, like Columbus, with the *conquistadores* (or conquerors), like Velasquez and Pizarro, who subjugated Cuba and Peru.

At the time of his advent in the West Indies, the Indians had been largely "pacified"—in other words, nearly exterminated—and the few survivors not laboring on the plantations of the Spaniards were hiding in the mountains. Without taking an active part in any pitched battle with the natives, or even in many skirmishes, yet Cortés was often employed in hunting them down, go-

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ing out with Velasquez on his murderous forays. In this manner he acquired an intimate knowledge of Indian modes of warfare, which served him well in after-years.

The life led by Cortés and his boon companions in Hispaniola was wild and licentious, without restraint of any sort whatever. Their treatment of the natives was most atrocious, as not only did they hold their honor in light esteem, but they frequently struck off an Indian's head or hand merely to "try the temper" of their swords. In default of fugitive Indians to harry, Cortés sometimes found vent for his flow of spirits in duels with his countrymen, the scars from which he is said to have carried to his grave.

## II

WITH VELASQUEZ IN CUBA

1511-1518

CONTAINING the first settlements founded by Europeans in the New World (Isabella, 1493, and Santo Domingo, 1496), Hispaniola had rapidly risen to a position of commanding importance, and while Hernando Cortés was in the island it was a centre of activities that had as their object the conquest of new territories and their settlement. With his enterprising and restless nature, it is strange that he was not drawn into some of the many schemes for conquest that had their origin in the island or were promoted there. It is on record, in fact, that he came near embarking on that ill-fated expedition fitted out in Hispaniola by Alonzo de Ojeda, in 1509, whom he was prevented from accompanying by illness. Among those who went with Ojeda, and of

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the few who survived the disastrous venture, were Vasco Nuñez de Balboa, who discovered the Pacific in 1513, and Francisco Pizarro, whom fate preserved to be the conqueror of Peru.

It was in the year 1509, also, that Don Diego Columbus, son of Christopher, arrived in Santo Domingo as viceroy, accompanied by his wife, the daughter of a Spanish grandee, and distantly related to King Ferdinand of Spain. Don Diego was a just man, and, in the main, ruled the Indies wisely. He extended his sway over the islands as rapidly as possible, and when, using the means nearest at hand, he despatched Diego Velasquez to complete the conquest of Cuba, he rewarded and recognized the merits of an old soldier, notwithstanding that he had been a favorite with Ovando, the enemy of his house.

Preparations for the Cuban campaign were a long time in progress, and it was not until 1511 that Velasquez finally sailed from the port of Santo Domingo, with four vessels and 300 men. The names of nearly all who went with him have passed into oblivion; but at least two besides himself, Hernando Cortés and Bartolomé de las Casas, are inseparably

## HERNANDO CORTÉS

connected with the great events attendant upon the conquest of America.

It was quite natural that Cortés should accompany his friend and boon companion, Velasquez, on this expedition, for they had hunted Indians and smaller game together, in the mountain fastnesses of Hispaniola, and were well acquainted with each other's qualities. Velasquez had tried the temper of Hernando Cortés in many a foray against the Indians of Hispaniola, and he was not disappointed at his behavior in Cuba. The young man, in fact, was in every fight in which his company took part. While fiery and courageous in battle, he was patient under the trials of the march, and in camp his good nature and lively wit won him hosts of friends. His character at that time was that of the "happy-go-lucky" adventurer, a part which he had sustained in Hispaniola, with no evidence of a nature more profound. At the age of twenty-six he was still the light-hearted youth who had sought gold and glory in America. Though he had found neither the one nor the other, he yet seemed content, and, after the Indians were "pacified," he took what lands and slaves fell to his share and settled down

## WITH VELASQUEZ IN CUBA

to a life closely patterned after that he had led in Hispaniola. The historian who knew him best in after-life alludes to him at this period as a "respectable hidalgo," when called upon to assume greater responsibilities, and an *alcalde* (judge or justice) of Santiago de Cuba.

Santiago was founded in 1515, and, though not the first Spanish settlement in Cuba (that honor belonging to Baracoa), soon became of the greatest importance, owing to its magnificent harbor and its commanding situation, on the south coast, facing Haiti-Santo Domingo and the sea-channel to Panama. Here Velasquez made his headquarters, hither flocked numerous noble families from Spain, and also many old soldiers from Darien, Jamaica, and other parts, where they had failed to find the fortunes they had come to seek.

In the train of Don Diego Columbus and his wife, Doña Maria de Toledo, there had come out to Santo Domingo quite a number of ladies, some of noble birth, who were in search (the gossips of the time asserted) of husbands with money, regardless of true merit or ancestry. Most of these ladies found the objects of their search in Santo

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Domingo, where they exerted a beneficial influence upon the uncouth colonists, and a few followed after Velasquez to Cuba. One of these was a lovely woman, Catalina Suarez Pacheco, whom Cortés had met in Santo Domingo, and to whom he had probably pledged himself; for she certainly had a claim upon him when in Santiago, which was supported not only by her family but by Governor Velasquez.

It is asserted that the governor was interested in one of Catalina's three sisters, and though there is no proof that he ever married her, still he was very insistent that his companion-at-arms, Cortés, should fulfil his obligations to the lady he had compromised. This the fickle Cortés was by no means willing to do, the care-free and irresponsible life he had led hitherto being far more to his liking.

Then ensued a comical contest between the two gallants, which ended in a doubtful victory for Velasquez; the recreant Cortés finally wedding the fair Catalina, with whom, as he subsequently boasted, he was "as well pleased as if she had been the daughter of a duchess." However this may have been, the actual fulfilment of his obligations was



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only brought about by compulsion, and Cortés never overlooked the officious interference of Velasquez.

Having a grievance against the governor, as he thought, he joined a body of malcontents and became the leader in a conspiracy, which Velasquez thwarted by clapping him into prison.

Contriving to break jail, Cortés took refuge in a church, where he was safe from arrest for a while, until again secured by stratagem and reimprisoned. Then he was placed in double irons and sent aboard a vessel bound for Santo Domingo, where he was to be judged in court for his offences. But he escaped a second time, and, plunging overboard at the risk of his life, swam to shore, regained his sanctuary in the church, and defied arrest.

Having secured a sword and suit of armor, in a spirit of bravado, one evening, Cortés left his chosen refuge and suddenly appeared before Velasquez in his own apartment at the palace. The governor was unarmed, and, being at the mercy of the man he had offended, he was compelled to listen to that man's estimate of his character. The two held a hot discussion, but finally, the humor

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of the situation appealing to Velasquez, and the feeling of old companionship asserting itself, he proffered a reconciliation. Cortés promptly fell into his arms, and they embraced like brothers—or, rather, like Spaniards and Frenchmen. When, shortly after, a messenger arrived with the news of the prisoner's escape, that fugitive was found, it is said, sleeping in the governor's bed.

This story cannot be declared authentic; but, in view of the intimate relations which had previously existed between these two campaigners, and the notoriously reckless disposition of Cortés, it is not improbable. At all events, the governor's favor was suddenly regained, and with it wealth and honor came to Cortés. He became prosperous as a planter and miner, being among the first to introduce choice cattle into Cuba and to work the mines of copper in the vicinity of Santiago. As to the poor Indians who toiled on his plantations and in his mines, many of whom died from abuse and over-work, says Las Casas, "God alone can render a proper accounting."

In the city of Santiago, to-day, may be seen the house which, according to tradition, was occupied by Cortés while he was alcalde;

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in the neighborhood was his estate, and in the mountains of Cobre, across the bay, were the mines from which he derived both gold and copper. There are no descendants living of the Indians who occupied Cuba at the coming of the Spaniards, for the last vestige of them passed away before the end of the century in which the island was invaded.

With the Spaniards firmly established in Cuba, the initial point for exploration and conquest was shifted from Hispaniola and its capital city of Santo Domingo to the island subsequently known as the "Pearl of the Antilles." Governor Velasquez encouraged the veteran soldiers from the Tierra Firme (as the coast country of South America, since called the "Spanish Main," was denominated) to embark on expeditions of adventure, and especially recommended that they should organize and make a descent upon some islands between Cuba and Honduras, for the purpose of obtaining slaves.

The old soldiers were poor but honorable men; they were athirst for adventure and for gold; but they rejected the governor's overtures, and sailed off in a more northerly direction than that he had suggested. They

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had induced a wealthy hidalgo, one Francisco de Cordova, who then lived at Sancti Spiritus, but who had come with Velasquez from Hispaniola, to take command of their little fleet of three small vessels and embark a portion of his fortune in the enterprise. They were piloted by the celebrated Alaminos, who had been with Columbus, and who later was in charge of the first vessel that made the voyage from Mexico to Spain.

Setting sail from Santiago one day in February, 1517, they finally made land at the northeastern extremity of the peninsula now known as Yucatan. Their pilot was not of great service, for they had wandered into unknown waters; but he was probably guided by the accounts left by Columbus, who learned of the Yucatan and Honduras coast in 1502, and by the vague description of De Solis and Pinzon, who had sighted it in 1506.

Still these bold adventurers were the first white men to land and "take possession" of the country—at least they were the first to make the attempt to do so; but were everywhere received with hostility by the natives, who in several battles killed half the entire company of 110, and wounded every one of the survivors, including the captain and Ala-

## WITH VELASQUEZ IN CUBA

minos. In their extremity, the adventurers burned their smallest vessel, and in the two craft remaining sped across the Gulf of Mexico to Florida. Thence they finally made their way to the harbor of Havana, where, two years later, a city was founded.

Captain Cordova was taken across the island to his plantation, where he soon died of his wounds, and an express was sent overland to Santiago, informing the governor of what the first expedition from Cuba had discovered. As some idols and ornaments of wrought gold had been found in a temple (which were, of course, secured and taken to Cuba), and as great cities built of stone had been seen, indicating a populous and probably wealthy country, the imagination of Velasquez took fire at once. He immediately commenced the fitting-out of another expedition, this time mainly at his own expense, which he placed under the command of his nephew, Juan de Grijalva, a worthy young man, and sent couriers all over the island for volunteers.

The unfortunate remnants of the first venture, veterans of many campaigns and planters of the island, had been compelled to shift for themselves, after landing at

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Havana, and had suffered many hardships. But such was the spirit of adventure that animated the restless souls of these gallant men, that all who were able to go enlisted at once, and also many others, so that a company of 200 was raised for the second expedition, which consisted of four vessels well equipped.

This second Cuban expedition, under command of Grijalva, sailed from the port of Matanzas early in April, 1518, ten days later passing the western cape of Cuba, and in eight more sighting the beautiful island of Cozumel, off the east coast of Yucatan. The strong sea-currents had set them to the southward of Cordova's course, but eight days later they landed at Champotan, where the first explorers had met with defeat, and where Grijalva's men were set upon by the natives, who were beaten back with great loss.

Thus, alternately fighting the ferocious Indians and sailing along the shores of an unknown land, Grijalva finally arrived at a point much farther westward than any white man had ever been before in those waters. He was rewarded not only by the discovery of a river (originally called the

## WITH VELASQUEZ IN CUBA

Grijalva, now the Tabasco), but by finding natives who received him hospitably, bringing the Spaniards quantities of cooked provisions and golden ornaments in the shape of birds and lizards.

These objects of gold, they informed Grijalva, came from a rich and powerful country far distant inland, known as "Acolhua," or "Mexico," words which the Spaniards first heard at that time. Still farther on, as the "River of Banners" (so called from the many Indians seen there with white flags), the Spaniards first met with emissaries of the great Montezuma, ruler over Mexico

### III

#### CORTÉS SETS OUT FOR MEXICO

1519

**M**ONTEZUMA'S messengers were abundantly supplied with provisions, and also with gold, which they gladly gave in exchange for such trifles (in their eyes of inestimable value) as cut glass and beads. Having acquired such a quantity of treasure, Grijalva thought it advisable to send a vessel back to Cuba with it, following it himself about a month later. This vessel was placed in charge of Pedro de Alvarado, who acquired great prominence in the subsequent campaign in Mexico. He was graciously received by Velasquez, who seemed overjoyed at the success of the enterprise; but when Grijalva finally returned to Cuba he was met with reproaches for not having planted a colony in the newly discovered land, instead of merely coasting its shores.



## CORTÉS SETS OUT FOR MEXICO

Grijalva appears to have been modest, as well as discreet, and, finding that his erratic relative did not intend to give him command of the greater expedition he was then fitting out, he made no protest, but quietly retired to his estate at Trinidad. He had sent and taken back gold to the amount of twenty thousand crowns, with which even the avaricious and captious Velasquez was well satisfied; but the positive information he had obtained—the first definite knowledge of a vast empire beyond that mysterious coast—was of greater value than the treasure.

Neither the dishonored Grijalva nor his men benefited from the discovery of this treasure, for it was appropriated by Velasquez, in the name of the king. The sturdy soldiers and sailors of the expedition had relied upon receiving large returns, especially as among the curious articles they had brought back to Cuba were more than 600 "golden" hatchets, which they had obtained by barter from the Indians. These hatchets were so bright and shining that they appeared to be of solid gold; but, says the historian who was one of the company, "there was great laughter in Cuba when they were assayed and found to be of copper."

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Rendered uneasy by the long absence of his nephew, Velasquez had despatched one Cristoval de Olid in search of him; but his caravel was nearly wrecked, and he had returned without tidings, just previous to the arrival of Alvarado. Meanwhile, preparations for a third expedition had gone forward, and by the time Grijalva returned were well advanced. This armament was to exceed the others in every respect, for, while Cordova had sailed with only three small vessels, and Grijalva with four, the new "armada" was to consist of ten.

Governor Velasquez was for a long while uncertain as to whom he should appoint commander of this great expedition. One man, the gallant Grijalva, had earned the right to this command, and if Velasquez had bestowed it upon him all his subsequent troubles might have been avoided. But, turning a deaf ear to the claims of his estimable nephew, the governor, making the natural mistake of a nature cankered by dissolute living, appointed the man who appealed to him through mercenary motives.

This man was Hernando Cortés, as appears by the "Instructions" issued by Velasquez, dated October 23, 1518, at Fernandina

## CORTÉS SETS OUT FOR MEXICO

(as Cuba was called at that time). It has been claimed that the governor made this appointment at the urgent recommendation of his secretary, Andres de Duero, and the king's *contador* (auditor) in Cuba, Amador de Lares; but those who make this claim seem to have lost sight of the long acquaintance which had already existed between Velasquez and Cortés. Irrespective of their influence, indeed, there were numerous reasons why the friend and former comrade of the governor should have received this important commission.

In the first place, Cortés was undoubtedly the best man for the command, so far as his abilities went; in the second, he was then one of the wealthiest men in Cuba, next to the governor himself, and from his nature was predisposed to lavish all his wealth upon the enterprise. With seven years to his credit in Hispaniola, and as many more in Cuba, throughout which long period Velasquez had known him intimately, it is unlikely indeed that Cortés owed less to his merits than to his influence.

Once assured of the command, Cortés, in the words of one who knew him, "made his money fly" to such good purpose that he

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soon won hosts of friends and followers. His popularity increased with the outflow of gold from his coffers, and soon, permitted by Velasquez to bear the major portion of the vast expense incident to the outfitting of the armament, he was obliged to mortgage his estates, to draw upon the resources of his friends, and to obtain advances from the merchants of Santiago.

In respect to his lavish generosity, Velasquez had made no mistake in counting upon Cortés; but the latter's reckless advances to gain popularity, and soon his evident desire to be off and away, began to excite the governor's suspicions. He well knew that his friend was capable, energetic, indomitable as a fighter, patient under reverses, abstemious, cool in danger, but ever crafty and calculating. He also realized, when his suspicions were aroused, that Cortés was most tenacious of his rights and privileges, keen, subtle—in short, that he possessed all the qualifications for independent and exclusive command, in whatever enterprise he might undertake.

Long accustomed to have his slightest wish obeyed, having for many years lorded it over herds of cringing natives, he had

## CORTÉS SETS OUT FOR MEXICO

acquired a domineering manner, which he tempered with deference when in the company of superiors. With the commonalty he was very popular, owing to his superficial gayety, his lavish expenditures (when convinced that they would promote his schemes), and his admirable temper, which was always held under rigid restraint.

Though hardly above the average height in stature, his shoulders were broad and his strength was great. As a horseman he was superb, having been in the saddle almost daily for years, while he greatly excelled at sword-play and in the practice of arms in general. His numerous "affairs of honor," when pursuing his amatory conquests, had given him a reputation which he had not yet outlived, despite his latter years of sober married life with Doña Catalina. His dark and flashing eye had a compelling effect upon all he met, and he was often feared when and where he was not respected.

When in the company of those of equal or superior station, he was ever "putting his best foot foremost," and as soon as he imagined himself secure in his appointment he "appeared in much greater state as to his own person, wearing a plume of feathers

## HERNANDO CORTÉS

and a gold medal in his cap, which ornaments became him very well." He surrounded himself with a body-guard, and Doña Catalina presented him with a standard of black velvet, embroidered in gold, upon which was a red cross in the midst of bluish flames, with the inspiring motto: "Brothers, let us follow this Cross with true faith, for by it we shall surely conquer."

Proclamation was made by drum and trumpet throughout the island, promising to volunteers shares in the gold to be found, and men flocked to his standard from every quarter. "Nothing was to be seen or spoken of," says one who went with the expedition, "but the selling of lands to purchase arms and horses, the quilting of coats of mail, the baking of bread, and the salting of pork for sea-stores."

It seems to have occurred to Velasquez, about this time, that he had been overhasty in naming Cortés for the command; but whether it was owing to suggestion from others or to a quickened conscience is not clearly known.

"Beware of this Cortés, an Estremaduran, full of crafty and ambitious thoughts," he was reminded by one.

## CORTÉS SETS OUT FOR MEXICO

"Have a care, Diego," said Cervantes, the governor's fool, one day, with the familiarity of the privileged jester, "or we shall have to go hunting for this Captain Cortés some time or other."

Cortés, who was walking with the governor at the time, turned upon the fool and cuffed his ears; but the latter reiterated his warning as he ran away, and added: "Long life to my friend Diego and his lucky captain. Methinks I shall go with him myself, that I may not see thee crying, friend Diego, at the bad bargain thou hast made."

Two different accounts are given of the departure of Cortés and his fleet from Santiago, one relating that he went only after taking courteous leave of the governor in due form, with vast politeness and frequent salutations on both sides; the other that he sailed hastily at sunrise, the indignant Velasquez arriving at the shore only just in time to see the last of the fleet as it drifted down the bay. We have, however, the evidence of a member of the party that the leave-taking was dignified, the governor accompanying his friend the captain-general to his flagship. It is also expressly stated that the fleet sailed when but half equipped and with



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less than its full complement of men, owing to the fears of Cortés that his commission might be revoked.

While he was drumming up recruits at the port of Trinidad (one of the oldest settlements on the south coast of Cuba), orders arrived, in fact, for the alcalde of that town to arrest and detain Captain-General Cortés, as the governor had deposed him and bestowed the position upon another. But the alcalde dared not enforce this command, so popular had Cortés become. He had, moreover, now received as accessions some of the choicest spirits among the rich hidalgos of Cuba, most of whom were at that time settled at or near Trinidad.

Ordering Pedro de Alvarado (the same who had returned with Grijalva's gold) to march overland from Trinidad to Havana, Cortés again put to sea, and met him in the latter port, where he completed the outfitting of the squadron. He had previously despoiled the king's farms at Macaca of such stores as he could find, and had taken by force all the meats that Santiago's butcher had on hand for the city's use on the morrow, rewarding him with a great gold chain which hung about his neck. Also, by great good luck falling





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in with a coasting-vessel laden with provisions, he seized its cargo, paying for the same in bills of exchange. Then, learning of another vessel coming along the coast from the westward, he despatched a ship to intercept it, thus recklessly playing the "gentleman corsair" at the very beginning of his great career.

While in Trinidad, Cortés had improved the time gathering munitions of every sort. All the smiths of the town were engaged in making arrow-heads, and as many as could be persuaded were enlisted, as well as soldiers and sailors. The musketeers and cross-bowmen were constantly practised in firing at marks, and scouts were sent out in all directions in search of horses, these animals being excessively scarce and dear. Horses had but recently been brought out from Europe, at infinite pains and expense, and were so valuable that only the richest planters could afford them. They were worth the services of many soldiers, and played such an important part in the conquest of Mexico that one of the historians makes special and loving mention of every one of the sixteen secured by Cortés for this enterprise.

The fleet assembled by Cortés in the since

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famous harbor of Havana consisted of eleven vessels, more than half of which were open brigantines or caravels, and the largest did not exceed one hundred tons' capacity.

The artillery consisted of ten brass guns of the heaviest caliber then known, and four falconets, or small pieces, for which there was an abundant supply of ammunition.

Enlisted in the expedition, finally, were 110 sailors and 553 soldiers, of which number only 16 were cavalry, 13 arquebusiers or musketeers, and 32 cross-bowmen, most of the men being armed merely with sword, lance, and shield or buckler.

Velasquez was still persistent in his intention of having Cortés superseded, as was shown by an order which arrived while the fleet was in Havana, commanding the alcalde, Pedro Barba, to arrest and send him to Santiago without fail. But, whatever may have caused the governor's change of attitude towards one whom he had already commissioned captain-general of the armada, nobody could be found rash enough to attempt to enforce the order; for by this time the best men of the island were with Cortés, either bodily or in spirit and intention.

## HERNANDO CORTÉS

Crafty Cortés had won, after all, the first skirmish in the battle royal between himself and Velasquez, who never again set eyes on any vessel of that noble fleet, nor ever recouped himself for the expense he had assumed. Through having kept his temper, with his face set steadily in the direction he wished to go, Hernando Cortés finally found himself clear of Cuba and afloat on the high seas, with favoring gales and currents wafting him towards Mexico.

Following the course of Grijalva, rather than that of Cordova, his first landfall was the island of Cozumel, a few miles distant from the northeast coast of Yucatan, at which he arrived about February 20th. Just two years had elapsed since Cordova, the pioneer in Mexican discovery, had set sail from Santiago, and ten months since sturdy Grijalva had landed at Cozumel. These two had done little more than point the way for the real conqueror of the then unknown country of Mexico, who was now afloat with an armament more than double the size of both fleets that had preceded him. Landing his men on a beach backed by a dense forest, from which came gales of spicy odors, Cortés reviewed and harangued them, set-

## CORTÉS SETS OUT FOR MEXICO

ting forth the objects of the expedition as plainly as he could, and waxing eloquent over the gains and glory that were to be theirs in coming contests with the infidels.

It is doubtful, however, if he made the speech which some historians have put in his mouth, and which rolls trippingly across their pages, as his eloquence was of the sort that appeals by action rather than by sounding words. The soldiers knew what they were there for: to fight, and to fight hard, for gold—all they could get, by whatever means—and incidentally for glory, though the halo of “glory” had long since dimmed in the vision of the Spanish conqueror. Some few were enthusiasts, like Cortés; some were fanatics, like his chaplain, Olmeda; but most of them blindly followed their leader.

## IV

### THE GREAT BATTLE OF TABASCO

1519

**I**N supreme command at last, with no one to thwart or repress him, Captain-General Cortés (as one of his soldiers says) “began to take command in earnest, and to show the mettle that was in him.” One of the vessels, in charge of Alvarado, had arrived at Cozumel ahead of the flag-ship, and he who afterwards committed the terrible massacre of Aztec nobles in Montezuma’s capital gave evidence as to his real character by landing and pillaging the temples of a town.

When Cortés arrived, he first placed the pilot of the vessel in irons for deserting the fleet, and then called up Alvarado and reprimanded him for his imprudence, telling him that he should rather have acquired the friendship of the natives, upon whom, or upon others like them, the Spaniards were to depend for success in their endeavors. It

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was a question of policy merely, not of humanity, for Cortés himself was afterwards guilty of the grossest cruelties towards the natives. Still, what he could do with impunity was not to be tolerated in a subordinate.

In the "Instructions," already alluded to, and which are remarkable for their wisdom and clarity, the following clause occurred: "You will keep along the coast of the island [as it was then thought to be] of Yucatan, *where are six Christians* in the power of some chiefs, who are known to Melchor Indio, who goes with you [as interpreter]. Treat said Melchor Indio kindly, in order that he may remain with you and serve you faithfully."

One of the very first acts of Cortés, after landing at Cozumel, goes to show that he began by following out these instructions to the letter. After setting free Alvarado's captives, and restoring to the temples the ornaments of which they had been despoiled (but which he soon after acquired, in exchange for worthless baubles), he set himself to solving two mysteries which confronted him at the outset.

The first mystery was that among other strange symbols sacred in the estimation of

## HERNANDO CORTÉS

the natives was a figure of the cross, carved in stone and set up in a court of their chief temple. Whence they derived the conception of this symbol is almost as much a mystery to-day as it was four centuries ago; but the priests who accompanied Cortés on the expedition explained it away by assuming that St. Thomas had visited the country in his wanderings. The scientists of the present day, however, conjecture that it was the symbol of the rain-god of the Mayas and Mexicans.

The second mystery was this: Two years before the arrival of Cortés on the coast of Yucatan the Indians of Campeche had accosted the soldiers of Cordova with the query, "Castilian? Castilian?" at the same time pointing to the east. Again at Cozumel the natives repeated this word, and finally it was disclosed that there were two Spanish prisoners (whom rumor had exaggerated into six) held by a Maya chieftain in the depths of Yucatan. Some Indian traders offered to take a message to them, and Cortés forthwith wrote:

"GENTLEMEN AND BROTHERS.—Here in Cozumel I have been informed that you have been detained by a cacique, and I request as a favor that



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you will join me without delay. I send a boat and soldiers, with whatever is necessary for your ransom, with orders to wait eight days; but come with all despatch to me, from whom you shall receive every assistance and protection."

The native traders were faithful to the trust reposed in them, and within two days after the main-land had been reached the letter was in the hands of the captives. One of them, named Alonzo de Guerrero, had married an Indian woman, whom he refused to leave, saying to his comrade, "Lo, I have three sons. I am a cacique and a war-chief. My face is tattooed, my ears and nose are bored. What would those Spaniards think of me? But, comrade, behold these three beautiful sons of mine! Give them, I beseech thee, some of those glass beads, and say that my brother sent them as a present to me from my own country."

Another reason for rejecting the proffer was that he had commanded the Indians in the battle which had been so disastrous to Cordova, and he rightly feared the vengeance of Cortés, who, when he heard of it, greatly desired to get him in his hands.

His companion, however, Jeronimo de Aguilar, eagerly embraced the opportunity

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for rejoining his countrymen, from whom he had been separated seven years. Having secured his master's permission, he hastened to the coast, crossed the channel in a canoe, and appeared at Cozumel. Cortés, once he recognized Aguilar (who, being nearly naked and as brown as an Indian, much resembled one), embraced him fervently and ordered him clothed and treated with distinction. He had been so long with the Indians that he had nearly lost his native speech; but he carried with him the remnants of a book of prayers, tied in a ragged bundle at his waist, and kept repeating, as though fearful of forgetting the few Spanish words he remembered, "Dios [God], Santa Maria, and Sevilla." He soon recovered his lost language, and, as he also spoke the Maya (or native tongue of Yucatan), he proved the greatest acquisition the expedition had received.

Having put his armament in order, and having forcibly "converted" the natives of Cozumel (by rolling their idols down the temple steps and placing an image of the Holy Virgin and a crucifix in their stead), Cortés sailed on his course again. He had thus far faithfully followed the governor's written instructions, and, above all, showed his deter-

## THE GREAT BATTLE OF TABASCO

mination to enforce clause fourteen of those instructions, which read: "Take great care to instruct the natives in the true faith, as this is the principal reason why their Highnesses permit these discoveries."

We will follow him now as, early in March, 1519, he sailed along the north and west coast of Yucatan, unaware of the ruins of ancient cities and remains of a wonderful civilization within the borders of that peninsula. Centuries were to pass before those walls of sculptured hieroglyphs contained in Chichen, Itza, Uxmal, Mayapan (more than half a hundred ruined cities in all) were to yield their rich treasures to the archæologist. Cortés and his men got a glimpse of what the Indian civilization was at Cozumel and Isla Mujeres, on the coast of Yucatan, but they knew not what it meant, nor cared. Gold was the object of their search—gold, and spoils of other sort, as well as the conquest of the heathen-dwellers in that unknown land.

It may not have been the captain-general's intention to attack the people of Tabasco; but as some of the Indians shot their arrows at the approaching boats through the leafy screens afforded by the mangroves, and

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others shouted defiance at the Spaniards from the banks of shallow streams, where they were gathered, evidently with hostile intent, he could not resist landing and giving them a lesson.

He held a hearty contempt for Indians, bred in his years of dealings with the mild-mannered natives of the islands; but he was to learn that they were not all alike. The Indians, also, were to find that they had now a man to deal with far different from Cordova and Grijalva, a man of "blood and iron," who brooked no opposition, who rode rough-shod over all who stood in his way.

It was not to be expected that Hernando Cortés would suffer those same Tabascans who had received Grijalva so hospitably to hurl insults at him and his men, instead of bestowing presents. But it seems that they had been reproached with cowardice by their neighbors of Champoton, and also threatened by the emissaries of Montezuma, and this accounted for their change of attitude towards the Spaniards. This was not then known to Cortés, but he resolved to punish them, and, that it might be done in a "strictly justifiable manner," as the old historian quaintly states it, he ordered Diego

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de Godoy, the royal notary, to read a proclamation to this effect: that the Spaniards merely desired to land for wood and water, to secure the submission of the natives to their sovereign and the prompt acceptance of their religion.

This proclamation was one that had been used many times before, for it had been formulated by learned men at court and given to all the conquerors. Setting aside, however, the fact that the natives might not be disposed to accept, off-hand, a new religion and new gods, and profess allegiance to a king of whom they had never heard before, another objection was that it was read in Spanish (a language they did not understand) and amid the deafening din of horns and trumpets.

Then, seeing that the stupid natives neither respected the king's command nor the proffers of the priests, Cortés gave the battle-cry (which had been so often heard in conflicts between the Spaniards and the Moors), "Santiago, and at them!" The fight began in earnest, for the Indians disputed every foot the Spaniards advanced, first on the river-bank, then on a plain adjacent, and it was not till Cortés called out

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the cavalry and ordered up the artillery that the assembled thousands began to yield.

The fighting began in the afternoon and was continued at dawn of the following day. Great guns from the vessels were landed, and their thunderous roar drowned the terrific shouts of the Indians, who were amazed, almost stupefied, at the noise and the terrible carnage. But they bravely stood their ground, ever filling the gaps made in their ranks by the plunging cannon-balls, and throwing dust and straw into the air to conceal their losses.

They withstood the cannon, strange and terrible as they appeared to them; but the prancing horses struck terror to their hearts. When they appeared, the Indians, to the estimated number of 30,000 or 40,000, had gathered on a great plain behind their town, which had been occupied by the infantry. While the arquebusiers and bowmen engaged them in front, Cortés with a few choice spirits made a détour and came upon the enemy in the rear.

Let us remember that this was the first sight the natives ever had of horses—that this was the first cavalry charge in Mexico. When, therefore, they saw those dreadful

## THE GREAT BATTLE OF TABASCO

apparitions, of four-footed beasts guided by armor-clad warriors, which trampled and crushed them underfoot, they fled in wild dismay. They thought man and beast one and the same creature, and were as astonished as terrified, as if we of the present day should behold some antediluvian monster rushing forth to devour and destroy.

It is hardly too much to say that all the soldiers in the army of invasion fought like tigers, and that Hernando Cortés himself proved a leader worthy a greater, better cause. He lost a sandal at the outset, when mired on the river-bank, but he withdrew his foot and pressed gallantly on, despite the fierce cries "Al Calchioni!" ("Strike at the captain!") resounding from every side and a perfect avalanche of barbaric missiles, arrows, javelins, and spears which came down upon his helm and corselet.

Victory was won at last, at a cost to the Spaniards of a hundred soldiers wounded and a few killed, but to the enemy of at least 1000 slain. The Indians could do nothing as against these soldiers clad in armor which their weapons could not penetrate, before those charges of ponderous beasts and the death-dealing cannon.



## HERNANDO CORTÉS

After the victors had dressed their wounds with the fat of the dead Indians found on the field, they were assembled in the town by the river, and Cortés, making three cuts with his sword in a great *ceiba* (silk-cotton-tree), proclaimed possession of the country in the name of his sovereigns, and ordered the royal notary to record the fact. He had made a landing in that hitherto unconquered country; he and his men had met and overcome the enemy; they could not, would not, retreat, but must now push on to further battles and victories.

The Indian hosts had melted away; but the next day an embassy appeared, with presents of the country's products, and followed by a train of twenty female slaves, for Cortés and his officers. They humbly begged permission to bury their dead, before the wild beasts should devour them, and their caciques tendered their submission to the great conqueror. Cortés assured them that he entertained no ill-will, and if they would become vassals of the Spanish king they might live in peace where they were. Religious services were held, and the female slaves were baptized, after the priest had instructed, in the faith of the conquerors,



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these "first of Christian converts in New Spain."

The results of that victory were greater than were at first known, for among the first-fruits of it were the Indian slaves, one of whom indeed proved a pearl of price. After the departure from Tabasco, and when off the Mexican coast, a canoe filled with Indians came out to the flag-ship. These Indians were Aztecs, whose speech no one in the fleet could understand. The only person who might have served as interpreter was Melchor Indio, who had been made captive by Grijalva, and had come with Cortés, as narrated. But Melchor Indio had run away at Tabasco, leaving his Spanish garments hanging on a tree; and as Aguilar, the rescued Spaniard, understood only his own language and that of Yucatan, he could not serve on this occasion. Then it was told Cortés that one of the Tabascan women could speak both the Aztec and the Maya of Yucatan, and upon being summoned she proved uncommonly capable, bright, and intelligent.

It appears that she had been born a princess, the daughter of a cacique, in the province of Coatzacoalcos. Her father had been

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killed while she was a babe. Her mother, marrying again, and desiring the cacique-ship for her son by the second union, sought to get rid of the daughter by selling her to some traders as a slave. In this manner the Indian princess had come into the possession of a certain cacique of Tabasco, by whom she was given to Cortés. She was unusually attractive in appearance, of noble bearing, despite her fallen state, and a natural linguist.

Owing to her acquaintance with the Aztec language, as well as with the habits and customs of the Mexicans, and to her great natural sagacity (which served the Spaniards at many a critical moment), she aided greatly in the conquest of the country of her birth, and became a personage of importance. This princess of Tabasco was known to the natives as *Malinché*, and from her being his associate Cortés was called *Malintzin*, or Malinche's lord and master; but the Spaniards named her Marina.

"Doña Marina," then, the enslaved princess of Tabasco, leaped at a bound into prominence when it became known that she could speak the Aztec tongue, for she was the only person in all that company of more than 600 who could do so. So she trans-

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lated what the Aztecs said into Maya, and Aguilar rendered it into Spanish, by which process it became known to Cortés and the rest. Thus for a time two interpreters and three languages were used in the intercourse between the Spaniards and the Mexicans. But it did not take long for the quick-witted Malinche to learn sufficient Spanish to serve all purposes, and she then became the sole medium of communication between the Aztecs and the invaders of their country.

## V

### IN THE PLUMED SERPENT'S LAND

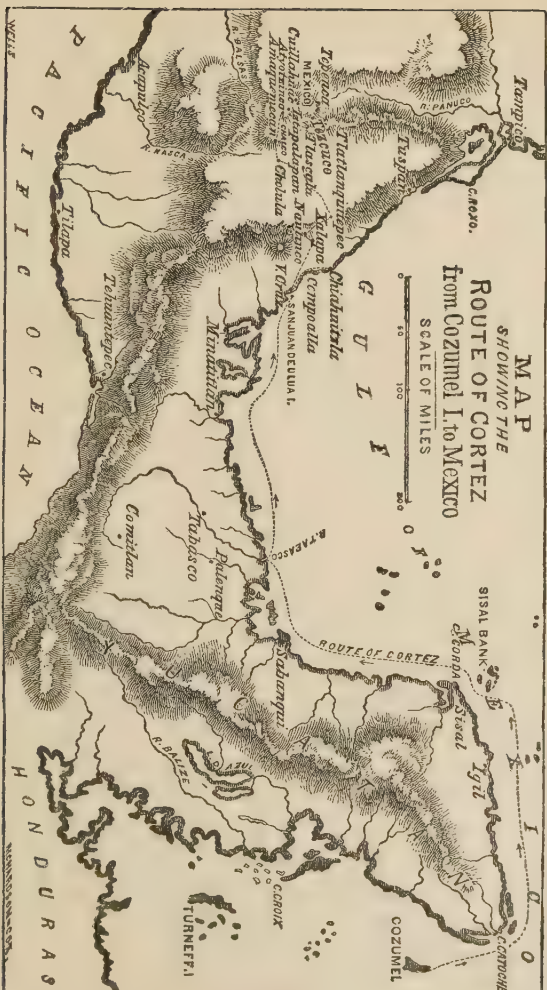
1519

CORTÉS left the river Grijalva, or Tabasco, on Palm Sunday, with the vessels of his fleet bedecked with leafy banners emblematical of the holy day. All his company were in high spirits, and as they passed along the curving shores of the great gulf those who had been with Grijalva pointed out the various objects of interest, such as the great river Guacacualco and the lofty mountains of the interior, their summits white with snow.

Thus sailing serenely along, with palm-leaves aloft, as a promise of peace, the fleet left behind it the ravaged region where so lately war had held high carnival, and on Holy Thursday, 1519, arrived at the port discovered by Grijalva and named by him San Juan de Ulua. The "San Juan" was a modest reference to his own name (which

# MAP SHOWING THE ROUTE OF CORTÉZ from Cozumel I. to Mexico

SCALE OF MILES



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was Juan, or John), and "Ulua" referred to the native name for Mexico, as nearly as it could be rendered into Spanish.

No sooner had the fleet cast anchor in the glassy waters of the bay, under shelter of the Isla de los Sacrificios, than a canoe darted out from shore and approached the flag-ship. Its passengers went on board and offered the captain-general gifts of fruits, flowers, and golden ornaments. They proved to be men of high rank in Montezuma's service; one of them, Teuhtlile, being the military governor of the province adjacent to the gulf. They had come to inquire of the strangers their errand and intentions, having watched for them ever since the departure of Grijalva.

Conversation at first was carried on by signs; but when it was discovered that Doña Marina knew their language, and also the Maya, which Aguilar could speak, it was conducted through the two interpreters. After making clear to the ambassadors from Montezuma that he had come to see the ruler of the country, or, at all events, the governor of the province, Cortés dismissed them, with some trifling presents in return for the gold they had brought.

The entire force was disembarked the next

## IN THE PLUMED SERPENT'S LAND

day upon a beach bordering the plain on which was subsequently erected "la Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz," or the Rich City of the True Cross. Two days later, shortly before noon of the succeeding Easter Sunday, Montezuma's governor, Teuhtlile, reappeared, accompanied by an immense throng bearing loads of provisions consisting of fish, fowl, and fruits of the country, besides bales of cotton cloth and gold. On the day previous a multitude of natives had been sent by him to construct shelters for the soldiers on the barren sand-hills bordering the shore, and here Cortés received him with great ceremony.

The Aztec noble was not to be outdone in politeness, even by the courteous Spaniards, and returned their salutations with a grace that showed acquaintance with the usages of refined society.

A collation followed, at which Governor Teuhtlile behaved so admirably as to evoke favorable comment from his hosts. After the repast was over the interpreters were called in, and the governor inquired, as before, as to the object of the white strangers in visiting his shores.

Cortés replied that he had come to open

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communication between his sovereign, the mighty Don Carlos of Spain, and the ruler of Mexico, to whom, by-the-way, he was anxious to send an embassy without further delay.

“What!” asked the Aztec noble, in amazement; “you are only just arrived, and yet you talk of seeing our great monarch, the peerless Montezuma? Impossible!—at least for the present; but accept these gifts which he sends you. There will be time to talk of other things afterwards.”

Speaking thus, he ordered his slaves to advance and lay at the feet of his guest the burdens they had brought, consisting of ten bales of cotton mantles, specimens of the wonderful *plumaje*, or native feather-work, and a basketful of golden ornaments ingeniously wrought. It was a gift well worthy acceptance by royalty itself; but in return Cortés presented the governor with an old arm-chair, carved and painted, a crimson cap, a quantity of cheap glass beads, and a brass medal with an effigy on it of St. George killing the mythical dragon. To this paltry present he added a gilded helmet which Teuhtlile had seen on the head of a soldier and much admired, remarking that it resembled one worn by their war-god.



## IN THE PLUMED SERPENT'S LAND

Meanness could go no further when Cortés remarked, as he presented the helmet, that he would be greatly pleased if it could be returned to him filled with gold. Then he explained, in a shamefaced way, that the Spaniards were afflicted with a disease of the heart which only gold could cure.

The ambassador departed for the Aztec capital, leaving another noble to supply the Spanish army with provisions during his absence. Eight days later he returned at the head of a long procession of Indians, some of whom bore him and other officials in hammocks on their shoulders, while others, to the number of more than a hundred, were staggering beneath great burdens of gifts.

That he had been able to perform the journey to the capital and return, not much less than 400 miles, in the time mentioned, seems incredible; but the statement is made on good authority. It is even related that King Montezuma was wont to receive fresh fish from the gulf daily, by means of relays of swift couriers; but this may well be doubted.

The Spaniards considered themselves richly rewarded for their labors when permitted to gaze upon the presents sent by Monte-

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zuma, which were displayed by Teuhtlile's attendants on mats spread on the sands. Wonders like these they had never beheld before. First (and this was the most dazzling of all), was a great disk of solid gold, as big as a wagon-wheel. This was said to be a symbol of the sun, and was worth \$200,000. Another disk, but of silver, represented the moon—of lesser value, but equally wonderful as to its workmanship. There were also thirty golden ducks, as many deer, and other animals known to the Mexicans; collars, gorgets, helmets, cuirasses, and plumes—all of gold, most exquisitely wrought. Besides these there were many bales of cotton garments, embroidered mantles, and the peculiarly valuable *plumaje*.

There, too, was the veritable helmet loaned by Cortés, and which, after having been examined and admired by Montezuma, had been returned filled with golden grains, to the value of 3000 crowns. It was a regal present, truly, surpassing in value anything the Spaniards had yet received from the New World aborigines since America had become known through the voyages of Columbus. In return for this glorious gift, what sent Cortés to the great Montezuma? A grandiloquent

## IN THE PLUMED SERPENT'S LAND

message, as on the former occasion; three Holland shirts, a gilded goblet, and some worthless baubles, which even a Spanish beggar would have rejected with scorn.

It would have been far better to have sent merely his thanks, for by this beggarly present (as the sequel will show) was the poverty and meanness of the Spaniards made known to Montezuma. He had sent word to Cortés, as commander of the invading army, that he would not be permitted to visit the capital city, and must depart from the country at once. This message, as we know, was not in accord with the inclinations of Cortés, and a second time he represented to Teuhtlile his desire for appearing in person before the king or emperor. The best that noble could do was to promise to transmit his request, which he did.

Ten days later, another long procession of Indians came winding down among the sand dunes, bearing a third and last present for the commander, to the value of more than 3000 ounces of gold. In addition to the gold, Montezuma sent four precious stones, called by the Aztecs *chalchiuils*, or native emeralds. In the estimation of the Mexicans each one was worth a back-load of gold; but

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these gems were found to have but little value in the marts of Europe. Still, these stones, as well as the gold and feather-work, denoted the great and generous nature which had inspired the gift, and aroused in the breasts of the Spaniards a burning desire to see the donor.

With this last gift came the emperor's final answer, denying the request of the Spaniards to advance into the country, and desiring them to leave, now that they had received the gold they sought. In emphasis of this message, which was in its nature a command, all the natives suddenly withdrew from the Spanish camp, and the next morning Cortés and his crew found themselves without supplies, except such as they had brought, consisting of mouldy cassava bread, decayed meats, and a few fish which the sailors had caught from the vessels.

The situation was serious; but at any time, it would seem, the Spaniards could sail for Cuba, even on short rations, and there already existed quite a faction loud in demands for immediate retreat. All the Spaniards had gone into raptures over the gifts, and gloated over the rich prize, in anticipation of their individual shares; but these

## IN THE PLUMED SERPENT'S LAND

proofs of Mexico's vast wealth produced various effects upon different minds. Most of the soldiers argued that such an empire (as Cortés had broadly hinted) would be a goodly one to conquer and despoil; but there were others, especially the friends of Velasquez, who saw in this very wealth that had been poured out before them an indication of resources betokening such a power of resistance as could not be overcome.

In order to understand the exaggerated importance which the Mexicans had attached to the coming of Cortés and his band, it will be necessary to interrupt the narrative of events in sequence and revert to the happenings of a previous time. When Governor Teuhtlile and his attendants first saluted Cortés, they bowed before him, touching their hands to the ground and kissing them, at the same time fumigating the strangers with incense. This was the customary salutation of ambassadors, as practised by the Mexicans, who addressed the strangers as *tetuctin* — lords, or nobles — which the interpreters wrongly translated as *teules*, or deities. In point of fact, as some have thought, the Mexicans at first really believed the Spaniards were the representatives of a deity they

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had long expected to visit their coasts—a mythical personage who figured in their traditions as Quetzalcoatl, or the God of Air.

For several years previous to the arrival of the Spaniards off the eastern coast of Mexico (if we may believe native traditions) the Mexicans, or Aztecs, had been vexed by startling portents, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and an irruption of the waters of Lake Tezcoco into the city of Mexico. In or about the year 1510, a turret of their great temple took fire and burned for many days without any visible cause. Finally a vast sheet of fire appeared in the eastern sky, accompanied by mysterious murmurings of the air.

The Aztec priests gave out that their chief deity, Huitzilopochtli, was angered, and to appease him the temple-pyramid on which he stood was covered from base to summit with rare feathers and plates of gold. His altars, too, were drenched with the blood of human victims; but their lives went out in vain, for the portents continued.

At last it was suggested that it was not the bloody war-god, but the peaceful Quetzalcoatl, that should be propitiated. The Plumed Serpent, as the latter was called, did





HUITZILOPOCHTLI, AZTEC GOD OF WAR





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not demand human sacrifices, but only offerings of fruits and flowers. He was a god of the ancient Toltecs, who inhabited the tableland of Mexico before the Aztecs came down from the north. His palaces were of silver, gold, and precious stones, and it was he who had taught the people the cutting of gems, casting of metals, and the wonderful featherwork. In his time (tradition said), a single ear of corn was a load for a man, pumpkins were six feet in circumference, gourds were as long as one's arm, while cotton grew on its stalks all colored and ready for weaving.

Driven from Mexico by the cruel Tezcatlipoca, the Plumed Serpent departed in his great canoe hewn from a silk-cotton-tree, wafted by fragrant gales to the eastward. After tarrying awhile in Tabasco and Coatzacoalcos, he went to Yucatan, where he was worshipped under the name of Kukulcan. On the front wall of the "Nun's House," in the ruined city of Uxmal, you may still find an effigy of the "Feathered Serpent" more than one hundred feet in length. It was carved many centuries ago, and whether it was intended as a "nature symbol" merely, or as a reminder of Quetzalcoatl's promise to return,

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at least the effigy has been there longer than the memory of mankind can recall.

Quetzalcoatl had promised, on his departure from Tula and Cholula, that he would sometime return by the route by which he had departed, and through all the changing centuries the Mayas and Mexicans had looked for him. When, therefore, news of the Spaniards' advent reached Aztlan, the Mexican capital, the prophecy of Quetzalcoatl was recalled. He was white and bearded—so were the strangers: he had departed in a great canoe—so came the strangers, in their ships with sails.

The Mexican officials who had met Grijalva at Tabasco, and those who had received Cortés at San Juan de Ulua, had with them expert artists, or picture-writers, whom they set at work depicting every detail of the armaments. So faithfully did they represent the bearded men and their winged ships that the agitated Montezuma, when he saw these pictures of Grijalva's company, was convinced that the Plumed Serpent had really arrived. So an embassy with rich gifts was sent to the coast, but too late to meet Grijalva, who had then sailed for Panuco, whence he returned directly to Cuba.

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When the embassy returned with the tidings to Anahuac, Montezuma was perplexed; but he caused sentinels to be posted along the coast, with swift runners at hand ready to bring him the first information respecting the coming of Quetzalcoatl, in order that he might send him gifts and perhaps offer homage.

These, then, were the conditions existing at the time Cortés appeared on the coast. The gifts that had been made ready for Grijalva were sent to his successor, and the fact that they were already prepared will explain the promptness with which they reached him.

Noting with what fidelity the native painters transferred the various scenes to "canvas," and desiring to impress the emperor with his power, Cortés ordered out the cavalry on the day of the governor's first visit, and the horses manœuvred on the sands. The Aztec artists were greatly impressed, of course; but they had scarcely recovered from their stupor of astonishment and regained the use of their hands when Cortés caused the artillery to be discharged. Then the roar of the cannon and the crashing of the great balls through the trees completed their consternation.

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It was some time before they could complete their work, for they not only had to calm their nerves, but, in order to transfer these new things to their sheets of prepared agave paper, they must invent new symbols, both for the man-mounted beasts and the "smoke-spitting thunder-weapons."

When these wonderful "picture-writings" reached the great Montezuma, he and his court experienced a new sensation. If they had gone to him without any verbal description by his subjects present at the scenes depicted, doubtless the Aztec monarch might have been convinced that the Plumed Serpent and his suite had actually landed on his shores. But, Teuhtlile and his staff had details to supply, as to the gross and carnal natures of these new arrivals, which absolutely precluded the belief that they were, or could be, connected with the great and good "God of Air." They had shown themselves, in truth, chiefly devoted to one deity, whom they would go any length to serve, and that was the God of Gold.

## VI

### AN ALLIANCE WITH THE TOTONACS

1519

CORTÉS had reason for considering himself a favored child of fortune. With a large fleet, and soldiers so far devoted to his cause, he had made admirable progress. At Cozumel he had benefited by the arrival of Aguilar, whose services as interpreter were only surpassed by those of Doña Marina, the two together affording means of communicating with the Mexicans which could not have been gained without them. Again, following right after Grijalva, who had created such a favorable impression upon Montezuma and the Mexicans, he received favors intended for him, and made the most of his prestige.

But for the grave mistakes he made, Cortés might have marched into the heart of Mexico without finding any considerable opposition. But he did not fulfil Montezuma's ideal as to

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what the leader of the mysterious strangers should have been, in the first place; in the second (as Teuhtlile reasoned), if he and his companions indeed suffered from a "disease of the heart" which could be cured only by gold, and had no higher ambitions than the gathering of it, they could not possibly be the men for whom the Mexicans were looking so anxiously and hopefully.

The Spanish leader's third and perhaps his greatest mistake arose from his forcible "conversion" of the natives. He had cast down the idols of Cozumel, leaving the Indians there with the cross and an image of the Virgin Mary as substitutes. He had forced the Tabascans to bow before these same objects, after slaughtering thousands of their warriors and while yet nursing dreadful wounds received in defence of their religion and their homes. So now, reviewing the "good work" he had accomplished in those instances, when an occasion came for speaking to the Mexicans on the subject, he promptly embraced it. This occasion came on the return of Teuhtlile from his last visit to Montezuma. As he was conversing with Cortés in the calm of evening-time, when all nature was at rest, and a benison of peace

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extended over earth and sea, the bell for vespers sounded on board ship, and all the Spaniards present fell upon their knees in prayer.

The astonished noble inquired of Marina the meaning of this ceremony, and she interpreted the question to Cortés. He promptly brought forward his favorite chaplain, Father Olmedo, who explained at length the mysteries of the Christian faith, and the cross, before which the Spaniards prostrated themselves in adoration. He went further than this and declared that, inasmuch as theirs was the "only true faith," it was their duty, and also their mission, to destroy all heathen idols, and convert those who worshipped them to the Christian belief, not even excepting the great monarch Montezuma. This statement was ardently seconded by Cortés himself, and, there no longer being any doubt in the mind of the Mexican that his cherished gods were to be objects of attack and the religion of his fathers made the subject of ridicule, he retired in wrath and confusion. The next morning (as we have seen) the Indians who had supplied the Spaniards with provisions had disappeared.

The Spaniards prepared for hostilities; but no attack came, and they sullenly turned to

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face their critical situation, increasingly perilous the longer they stayed in Mexico. Cortés had to confess himself beaten in the game of diplomacy played between himself and Montezuma; but he was equal to any emergency when it came to managing his band of fretful Spaniards. When, therefore, it became known to him that the majority of his company objected to going any farther, and desired to return to Cuba, he gave orders that the fleet should be made ready for that purpose; but with no intention whatever of proceeding in any other direction than towards the Mexican capital. He had slyly sounded his soldiers, and had correctly judged that the larger number would not be in favor of retracing their steps if they were put to a test. And so it proved, for when it was announced that all who desired could proceed to Cuba, there was a most furious outcry among those who either wished to found a colony on the coast, or to march inland and attempt the conquest of the country.

They called upon Cortés in a body, and, after reminding him of the treatment the unhappy Grijalva had received at the hands of Governor Velasquez (having been deprived of his command for failing to found a colo-



## AN ALLIANCE WITH THE TOTONACS

ny), demanded to see his instructions. When these were produced, it was found that nothing had been said as to a settlement in the country, but that great stress was laid upon the getting of gold, extending the dominions of the king, and converting the heathen. The faction in favor of Velasquez professed to see in this omission a reason for their being sent home to Cuba, which they demanded. They also insisted upon a fair division of the spoils, after first setting aside the "royal fifth" for the king of Spain.

In the name of that same sovereign, the soldiers desirous of remaining in Mexico demanded that Cortés should stay and at once lay the foundation of a colony, as any other course, they said, would be disloyal to the crown. Still pretending that he desired only to satisfy the greater number, and protesting his loyalty to the king as well as to the governor of Cuba, Cortés yet affected to see a majority in favor of remaining, which was the course he wished to pursue.

"The only way out of it," he said, "is to commence a settlement—at least on paper—in the name of the sovereigns, and without delay." So he named the officials forthwith, for *alcaldes* choosing Puertocarrero, a

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steadfast friend of his, and Montejo, who was equally devoted to Velasquez. The remaining officials necessary to the organization of a Spanish pueblo, or town, such as the *regidores*, or aldermen, the treasurer, *alguacils*, or constables, etc., were all from the ranks of his friends, so at the very outset the Velasquez faction was in the minority. This being the case, it was not at all strange that, when Cortés later appeared before the newly established municipality, cap in hand, and, with a semblance of humility, proffered his resignation as captain-general of the armada, no time was lost in carrying out his desires. "Inasmuch as *the governor's authority is now superseded by that of the magistracy*," he remarked, "and my tenure of office now terminates, I resign, etc."

That was the way out of his difficulties with the governor: to deprive him of authority, and act henceforth in the name of the sovereign only. All his future acts, in fact, were shaped to win the favor of that sovereign and excuse his betrayal of Velasquez. After a show of deliberation the officials who had been appointed by Cortés nominated him chief-justice of the new colony, as well as captain-general, and thus, with civil author-

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ity now added to his military power, he was wellnigh invincible.

There were those, to be sure, who denounced the entire proceeding as a conspiracy against Velasquez—as in truth it was—and some few were so loud in their outcries that Cortés forthwith put them in irons, and sent them aboard one of the vessels as prisoners. Their ardor soon cooled, in the seclusion of the vessel's hold, and they were released, after promising to support the cause of Cortés—to which, by means of bribes and promises, the commander managed to attach most of the cavaliers, at least for a time.

After losing thirty of his men by disease, Cortés concluded to transfer his municipal skeleton to another and more salubrious spot. He had already despatched a vessel in search of a better harbor than that of Vera Cruz, and such a place was found in Chiahuitzla, a few leagues to the northward. While he was preparing for removal to this place he was approached by some strange Indians from a city called Cempoalla, who stated that they were subjects of Montezuma, whose armies had overrun their territory and annexed it.

They were different from the Aztecs, being

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natives of the tropical lowlands—Totonacs. They possessed a somewhat refined civilization, a government and religion similar to those of their conquerors, and they lived in a large stone city, mainly, within the forest fringe of the *tierra caliente*, or hot country.

This city, Cempoalla, which the Spaniards finally sighted at the end of a hot and wearisome march, was built of white and glistening stone, and when one of the advance-guard caught a glimpse of it shining through the forest vegetation with a splendor all its own, he dashed hurriedly back to the main body, shouting, "Here is a city of silver!"

Having had tangible evidence of the country's richness in Montezuma's gifts, the soldiers were ready to believe any wonderful tale, so they pressed forward eagerly towards the "silver city," in very good humor with themselves and also with their commander, grim and crafty Cortés.

At last they met an embassy led by the cacique of Cempoalla, who was so fat and huge that he had to be borne in a litter. He made a speech of welcome, in which he gave assurance of his friendly feeling for the strangers, and also hinted that he and his people looked to them for release from the

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Mexicans' galling fetters. They were hard to bear, he said, because their oppressors drafted from the flower of the populace their young men and maidens, as slaves, and victims for their sacrifices to the war-god.

Shrewd and far-seeing Cortés promised, of course, all they desired, and far more than they expected, for he saw in their discontent a prospect of gaining allies, especially men for transporting his munitions on the long march—upon which he had already decided—to the Aztec city.

Thus the exultant Spaniards marched merrily into the city of Cempoalla and were quartered in its public buildings. Their progress was in the nature of a triumphal procession through streets lined with wondering Indians, and amid admiring throngs, who decked the soldiers and the horses of the cavaliers with garlands of flowers. Among the gifts forced upon them by the fat cacique there was only gold enough to indicate the richness of the region and the generous disposition of the people, who brought their guests baskets of native plums, cassava bread, and maize.

After a refreshing rest amid such hospitable surroundings, the little army set for-

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ward next morning for Chiahuitzla, accompanied by the fat cacique and a retinue of nobles, as also by 400 of the common people, who, according to the custom of the land, served as porters. This arrangement was well liked by the weary soldiers, who were thus relieved from the necessity of hauling the cumbrous cannon and supplies. Some of them even divested themselves of their heavy armor, their arquebuses and cross-bows; though when the ever-alert Cortés discovered this he ordered the soldiers to resume their weapons, for it was not wise to trust an enemy in his own country.

Arrived at Chiahuitzla, which was situated above a fine harbor, on a hill naturally well fortified, Cortés called a conference of the Cempoallans, for the purpose of discussing a rupture of their relations with Montezuma and throwing off his yoke of bondage. The fat cacique expressed himself right valiantly as without reserve in favor of it; but suddenly a change came over him, for a messenger arrived with the news that a band of Montezuma's tribute-gatherers was even then entering the town. The conference broke up in a hurry, and the cowardly Cempoallans slunk away as, attended by a large retinue,

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with noses held up in the air, and their attention seemingly given to bunches of roses which they held in their hands, five Mexican nobles marched stiffly through the city streets.

When Cortés learned from the cringing Totonacs that the Mexicans had come to demand victims for sacrifice, he affected the greatest indignation, and ordered them to place those proud nobles in chains. At first the Totonacs were horrified ; but on reflection, knowing that Cortés was armed with the powers of the thunder and the lightning, and that he could slay thousands at a stroke, they tremblingly complied. They were amazed at their own audacity, knowing well that now they had committed the deed that would bring upon their heads the direst punishment unless protected by their new-found friends.

This Cortés also knew, hence he had compelled them to arrest the Mexicans instead of having his soldiers do it. And in order to rivet the chains upon their necks, and to make it appear that the deed had been done without his sanction, he had the Mexicans brought before him, by stealth, at night, to whom he declared that to assure their safety he must have them sent aboard a vessel in the harbor. The Cempoallans were infuriated,

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he explained, but he, Cortés, would protect them with men and with cannon if need be, for he was a friend, and would be an ally, of their great emperor Montezuma, to whom he now sent them with a message of peace and a proffer of assistance. With this he sent them ashore again, after the tumult was over, and the deluded Mexicans hastened to Montezuma with a statement of what had occurred. It was colored by such a relation of the Spanish commander's act of friendship that their sovereign soon after sent another embassy to Cortés with rich gifts, and his thanks for rescuing his officials from the enraged Totonacs, whom he would surely punish as they deserved.

Having committed this act of basest perfidy to his allies, Cortés endeavored to allay their just resentment by leading his soldiers against some neighboring tribes with whom they were at war. While on the march he gave further evidence of his "impartial sense of justice" by hanging a poor soldier of his command who had stolen a fowl from one of the Totonacs. He was cut down when almost at his last gasp, by Pedro de Alvarado, who grimly remarked that they could not afford to lose a soldier, be he good or bad,



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when they were so few in number. But the lesson, as intended by the commander, was not lost upon the corpulent cacique, who, when they reached his capital, begged Cortés and his officers to accept eight Indian damsels, whom he presented to them richly dressed, as a slight token of his high esteem.

Mindful of his wife in Cuba and the obligations he had already incurred, Cortés was slow to accept this present, especially as the lady intended for him was almost as gross and unattractive as the cacique, who was her uncle. As usual, he concealed his real reasons, and sought an excuse in the fact that the maidens were not of his own faith, and that it was forbidden to Spaniards to intermarry with idolaters. He and Father Olmedo improved the occasion to declaim against their idols, and especially their bloody sacrifices of human beings, which (even though the Cempoallans were now allies of the Spaniards), were still continued.

The cacique objected, saying that his gods had been very good to him and his people, on the whole, giving them rains and harvests, health and happiness, but that if he were ungrateful they would doubtless destroy him. He had no objection, he said, to receiving the

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gods of the Spaniards, and would gladly make room for them in the temples; but as for giving up his own, it would never, never do.

Above him, on the flat summits of the *teocallis* (or temple-pyramids), grinned his hideous idols; around him were grouped his horrid priests, their long, black hair matted with gore, their garments of cotton stained with human blood. Fanatic was opposed to fanatic, but the Spanish fanatics were the stronger, and of course prevailed.

"Spaniards and brothers," said Cortés, addressing the assembled soldiers (who had been called to arms for this very purpose), "we inherit from our fathers the love of our most holy faith. These people must abjure their idolatrous practices and become good Christians. Let us now prostrate these vile images, plant in their stead the cross, and call these heathen beneath that holy symbol which is inscribed upon our banner. For my part, I am resolved that these pagan idols shall be destroyed—now, this very hour, even if my life shall be the forfeit!"

This impassioned speech was greeted with ringing cheers. Fifty soldiers sprang at once up the terraced sides of the pyramids, cast down the idols from their lofty stations and

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broke them in pieces on the pavement. The cacique and the priests called upon their warriors to resist. They, with their bows and arrows, spears and mighty war-clubs, would have fallen upon the Spaniards; but they were awed by the shining swords so menacingly brandished, by the black-mouthed cannon, and the flaming matchlocks, ready (as they knew) to vomit forth destruction and death.

## VII

### CORTÉS DESTROYS HIS FLEET

1519

NO dire disaster followed the destruction of the idols, and the cacique was reconciled to the emblems of a new religion established in their stead. More than this, he consented to the re-employment of his priests, and those erstwhile pagans, their blood-stained garments changed for robes of white, cheerfully officiated in the renovated temples. An old soldier, with one eye and a wooden leg, was placed in charge of the *teocallis*. He was too lame to follow his army, his fighting days were over, so he gladly became a pious hermit, and his comrades left him in charge of the temples.

The Totonacs accepted a change of religion and idols as they might have cast off an old garment and donned a new one. Like the Cozumelans and Tabascans, they were forcibly converted to the new faith. They clung

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to it while the Spaniards were with them, then lapsed into the worship of their ancient deities. Cortés commanded the old soldier to instruct them in the making of wax candles, to be burned before the Virgin, and after the Indians had been treated by Father Olmedo to another sermon on their duties to religion, they were allowed to retire to their huts.

Meanwhile work on the new city at the coast had been carried along with vigor, so that, while making friends and allies of the natives, Cortés had also established a base of supplies and a strong fortress as a retreat in emergency. This, the first settlement made by white men in Mexico, occupied a plain at the foot of a mountain about four leagues north of Cempoalla, and Cortés himself assisted in laying the foundations, working with his men, as he marched with them to battle, in the fore-front, encouraging them by his example.

The soldiers had seen these preparations for a fixed base in the new country, some with exultation, others in despair. They were aware, by this time, of their commander's unyielding character, and knew that, having set his face towards the object of his desires,

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there would be no turning back; but they did not even dream of the means he would take for preventing their departure, as Cortés took one step at a time and kept his own counsel.

The foundations of a city having been laid with due ceremony (a jail and a gallows-tree being among the first structures erected, as was the Spanish custom of those times), Cortés next turned his attention to securing favor at the Spanish court. By a vessel just arrived at the port he received information that Velasquez had obtained a warrant for colonizing new countries, over which he was to exercise the power of *adelantado*, or supreme governor. This was a serious thing for Cortés, as he himself desired to be made *adelantado* over Mexico (when he should have conquered it), and therefore must secure the favor of his sovereign and establish direct connection with Spain instead of with Cuba and Velasquez. The manner in which he thought of doing this was by sending a vessel straight to Spain, laden with all the treasure obtained from Montezuma, together with a letter explaining the true nature and extent of his discoveries, with a request for authority to continue in his scheme of conquest.

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By means of bribes and threats he induced the soldiers to part with their individual shares of Montezuma's treasure, setting the example himself by giving up the fifth which had been granted him by the council; and the whole was sent, a glorious gift, to the emperor. The best vessel of the fleet was selected, manned with fifteen sailors, and placed in charge of Puertocarrero and Montejo, with the veteran Alaminos as pilot. This vessel, the first that ever made a direct voyage between Mexico and Spain, set sail on July 26, 1519, carrying the commissioners and the Aztec treasure. A circular letter from Cortés, the council, and the common soldiers, stated what great things had been done, and the still greater yet to do, in the conquest of a vast empire, the resources of which might be inferred from the treasure remitted to his highness, as a pledge of their loyalty and devotion.

"And we further stated," says one of that intrepid band, "how we were at present 450 soldiers, surrounded by hosts of enemies, and ready to lay down our lives for the service of God and his majesty. And we supplicated that his majesty would be pleased not to bestow the government of so great and rich

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a country, which deserved to be ruled by a great prince or lord, on any unworthy person. In the mean time, we remained under the command of his majesty's faithful servant, Cortés, whose merits we exalted to the skies."

Cortés himself wrote and sent by the hands of Puertocarrero, the first letter of that remarkable series known as the "*Cartas de Cortés*," which historians have pronounced peerless of their kind, and which proved that their author, like the great Cæsar, could handle the pen with facility, as well as the sword. The devoted craft containing this desperate venture of that little band, then cut off from all others of their race, on the coast of an unknown country, sailed on its course for Spain. Contrary to orders, she touched in at a port on the north coast of Cuba, whence the tidings were carried to Velasquez by a sailor who deserted the ship. The governor sent a warship to intercept her without delay, but she evaded capture, and after a voyage considered short and prosperous for those days, arrived safely at San Lucar in October.

A few days after the sailing of the ship for Spain, some soldiers and sailors, friends of



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Velasquez, seized a ship in port, intending to hasten to Cuba and beg the governor's assistance. Their conspiracy was betrayed to Cortés, who, acting with his customary promptness, sentenced the ringleaders to death, cut off both feet of the pilot, and gave the rest one hundred lashes each, sparing only one, a priest. Among those who were executed was the very man who, in his capacity of *alguacil*, had arrested Cortés in Cuba when trying to escape the clutches of Velasquez.

Stern Cortés urged swift judgment upon the rebels; but, says an eye-witness of the occurrences, he sighed deeply when he came to ratify their sentence, exclaiming, "How happy is he who is not able to write, and is thereby prevented from signing the death-warrants of his fellow-men!"

This attempt at desertion, so nearly successful, caused Cortés to determine upon the removal of such a menace to his success and safety as a fleet in his rear, while he himself might be hundreds of miles distant from his coastal base, and in the midst of enemies. After the pretence of a survey by a board of officers, he gave orders for the entire squadron to be *sunk at its moorings*. The vessels

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were dismantled, all their removable equipment taken on shore, and then, with the sole exception of one small craft, they were scuttled. Thus all means of present escape from the country were removed, whether of friends of Velasquez or Cortés.

Both soldiers and sailors were appalled at this desperate act. Murmurs arose that were only hushed when their great leader appealed to their pride of race, to their sense of justice, even remarking that he himself was the greatest sufferer, as two-thirds of the fleet belonged to him, and by destroying the ships he had sacrificed all his worldly possessions. It would seem, he said, like distrusting the valor of the Spanish soldier to assert that, now all means of retreat were cut off, his followers must either conquer or die; but their reason would convince them that by releasing 100 sailors the force of fighting men was greatly strengthened.

A valiant veteran, Juan de Escalante, was left in charge of Villa Rica, with a command composed chiefly of the disabled men of the army and navy. He was commended to the protection of Cempoalla's cacique, who furnished Cortés with 2000 men as carriers, together with 200 more to draw the cannon. A

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definite departure from the coast was made on August 16, 1519, and the long journey to Anahuac was at last begun.

Six months had passed since that gallant company set sail from Santiago, two-thirds of the time having been taken up in fruitless negotiations and contentions among themselves. But in the end the inflexible Cortés had triumphed, and he now had the satisfaction of setting out in earnest for the Aztec capital, to which he had not been invited, but from which, in truth, he had been warned away.

Little recked stout Cortés that the great Montezuma had denied him hospitality. He had a message to deliver, a cause to advance. He was now rejoicing at the end of inaction and nursing hopeful anticipations of ultimate triumphs. Some of his soldiers may have shared their commander's sentiments; at all events they were overcome by his forceful arguments, supported as they were by the civil and military authority with which they themselves had clothed him. At first stupefied at the loss of their ships—their only means of escape from the country—then sullenly yielding consent to their leader's schemes, finally they thrilled with the en-

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thusiasm born of high emprise, and shouted, "On to Mexico!"

Those valiant captains, Sandoval and Alvarado, had made forays into all the region roundabout Totonac territory, compelling the people to acknowledge Spanish supremacy, so Cortés left no foes behind to "kindle a fire in the rear," and the invaders marched forward with confidence, though compelled to subsist upon the country as they went along. Passing through the *tierra caliente*, with its wonderful forms of tropical vegetation, the Spaniards next entered a region lying at a higher altitude, where the signs of exuberant fertility and the softness of the airs made a visible impression upon their spirits. Finding peace and contentment everywhere, and relieved of their burdens by the 2000 Indian carriers, the soldiers swung merrily along, by nightfall of the first day reaching the aboriginal city of Jalapa.

Jalapa is situated at a height of about 4000 feet above the level of the sea, amid scenery of surpassing beauty. Grandeur and wide-spread became the views as the invaders climbed the slopes of the eastern cordilleras. Great mountains and deep *barrancas* opened to their view, above all rising splen-

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did Orizaba, the Aztec *Ciltlaltepētēl*, or "Mountain of the Star," whose shining, snow-covered peak had greeted them through the mists of the gulf as they approached the coast at Vera Cruz. The heated coast region was now far below them, and they were traversing the verdant vales and oak-crowned hills of Mexico's second climatic zone, the *templado*, or temperate region. Beyond that they encountered the keen, searching winds of the *tierra fría*, the zone of cold, where their Indians of the hot country, especially those from torrid Cuba, suffered terribly from exposure, some of them falling before the blasts and dying in their tracks.

When well into the *tierra fría*, they came to a place called Xocotla, containing thirteen temples and other large stone structures. Here they received definite information as to "what sort of a person the great Montezuma was" of whom they had heard so much. He was the most powerful monarch in the world, said the cacique of Xocotla province, who told them further that the renowned city of Mexico, Aztlan, was built upon an island in a lake, which was the centre of a vast and beautiful valley. This city was accessible only by canoes, or by four great

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causeways of stone several miles in length, in which were wooden bridges that could be raised, thus cutting off communication with the main-land, as many Spaniards afterwards found at the cost of their lives on the night of their retreat from the Mexican city in the lake.

In response to a demand that Cortés made for gold to send to his sovereign beyond the sea, the cacique answered, tauntingly: "Gold? Yea, have I gold enough; but I cannot give it without the orders of Montezuma, my king. Though if he orders me, I will render up not only that, but all my estate, even my life itself!"

"Sayest thou so?" rejoined Cortés. "Then will I soon make him order you to give it me, and all that you have. Moreover, I shall require you and all others to renounce your human sacrifices, cannibal feasts, and other abominable practices; for such is the command of our Lord God, whom we adore and believe, and who, at the last, is to raise us up in heaven." He was moved to these remarks by what he had seen in one of the temple courts, where were thousands of human skulls heaped up in front of the idols.

The Spaniards were surely in no condition to enforce any demands they might make,

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being greatly fatigued and wellnigh famished. Cortés, also, was called upon at Xocotla to decide between two routes leading thence to Mexico, one being by way of Cholula and through territory entirely controlled by the Aztecs; the other *via* Tlascala, a small republic, which for many years had maintained successful opposition to the Mexicans. The Cholulans were the milder people, he was told, but treacherous and in the pay of Montezuma; while the Tlascalans, though valiant and warlike, were at peace with the Totonacs, who strongly advised Cortés to pass through their territory.

Acting upon their advice, Cortés sent a letter, in which he informed the Tlascalans that he was on his way to Mexico and desired safe conduct through their republic, adding that he had freed the Totonacs from the yoke of Mexico and might also be of service to them in their wars. It was a crafty message, with but one defect: it was written in Spanish, a language which, of course, the Tlascalans did not understand. This did not matter in the eyes of Cortés, who sent the letter by the hands of four Cempoallans, together with gifts: a crimson cap, a sword, and a cross-bow.

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There was no mistaking either the purport of the letter or the meaning of the gifts, as one of the Cempoallans, when arrived at the capital of Tlascala, addressed the senate, the governing body of the republic, saying: "Most great and valiant chiefs, may the gods prosper you and grant victories over your enemies. The lord of Cempoalla, and all the tribes of the Totonacs, desire to acquaint you that from the East, from the direction of the great sea, have arrived in large ships, on the coasts of our country, certain bold and adventurous men, by the assistance of whom we have been freed from the tyrannical dominion of the Mexican king."

This was the speech (errors arising from mistakes made by the historians aside) as reported by one of the company so anxiously awaiting the Tlascalans' response. The four lords, chiefs, or caciques who composed the government, after long deliberation, declared in favor of admitting the strangers within their walls; but a son of one of these lords, young Xicotencatl, who was also commander-in-chief of the armies, recommended caution. Lord Maxicatzin, one of the nobles, having suggested the possibility of these men being messengers from Quetzalcoatl, Chief Xico-



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tencatl scornfully replied: "Say, rather, they are monsters cast up from the sea because it could not endure them in its waters. . . . These are not gods who so greedily covet gold and carnal pleasures; and he wrongs the honor of this republic who says it can be overcome by a mere handful of base adventurers. . . . Let me have my way with them first. If they are mortal, the arms of the Tlascalans will proclaim it all around; and if immortal, there will yet be time to allay their anger by homage and implore their mercy!"

## VIII

### ENCOUNTERS WITH THE TLASCALANS

1519

THE war chief's counsels prevailed, and he was allowed to march upon the strangers with his army. In this instance cunning and craft were opposed, and the astute Cortés almost met his match in the wily Xicotencatl, who said, as he departed, "If we come out victorious we will do our arms immortal honor; but if we are vanquished we will accuse the Otomies of undertaking war without our orders!"

The Otomies were inferior allies of the Tlascalans, who dwelt on the eastern border of the republic, and to whom was committed the guarding of a narrow pass leading from the lowlands to the great plateau, where the stronger peoples resided. After waiting several days for the return of his ambassadors, Cortés ordered the army to advance. They had marched but a short distance when they

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found their progress arrested by an immense wall of hewn rocks extending between two mountains about six miles apart. This wall was nearly twenty feet high, forming a rampart of defence which, if strongly guarded, would have been difficult to overcome. It had but one narrow passageway, constructed in such a manner that a few determined men could have held it against 1000.

The Spaniards crowded about its portal, wondering what awaited them on the other side. After gazing at it thoughtfully for a space, Cortés gave the order, "Comrades, follow your standard, the holy cross, beneath which we shall conquer!" and himself led the way into Tlascalan territory.

"On, on to Mexico!" responded the soldiers. "We are ready. God is our support!" and they pressed forward eagerly.

No enemy opposed them there, though flying detachments were seen at a distance hastening to the defence of the pass. The Spaniards had good reason to rejoice at their tardiness, as, when the troop of cavalry ordered to pursue them came to close quarters with these barbarians, they were assailed with such fury that they were compelled to fight strictly on the defensive. The savages

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were expert in handling the great double-bladed sword called by them the *maquahuitl*, which, though made of wood, was set with sharp obsidian points, and was the most formidable weapon the Spaniards had encountered. Armed with this great broadsword, the Otomies and Tlascalans pressed the horsemen so sorely that they might have been cut to pieces but for the opportune arrival of the infantry.

Two horses were killed, each at a blow of the *maquahuitl*, and a great shout of triumph went up from the savage ranks. The Tlascalans treated their terrible losses with contempt, notwithstanding the discharges of cannon, arquebuses and cross-bows, speeding deadly bolts, for they had proved their contention that the strangers were merely mortal. In token of this, then and there, while the battle raged unheeded around them, these savage experimenters cut the animals into small pieces, which were sent, post-haste, to every part of the republic. In the Spanish camp the loss of the horses was lamented as beyond repair, for they were reckoned equal to a host of common soldiers when in battle with the Indians. Night alone terminated this first engagement, and the Span-

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iards encamped in a deserted village, where, their provisions being low, they were very glad to catch, kill, and devour the native dogs as they sought their homes and masters. Cortés had good reason to dread the coming of the morrow, for he knew that a vast army was assembling to oppose him, and only awaiting daylight to begin the attack. Still, undaunted, he went among his soldiers, encouraging them the best he could.

The Spaniards slept on their weapons, and at daybreak next morning every man was ready for action. As the sun rose on that fateful day its first rays gilded the helmets and illumined the banners of an army, 50,000 strong, assembled on the plain. Against this vast array was opposed that little band of Spaniards, scarce 500 in number.

As if to show his contempt for the enemy, before the second fight began, Xicotencatl sent to Cortés 200 baskets of cassava cakes and 300 turkeys. The soldiers were rejoiced to get these provisions, for they were nearly famished; but they had hardly appeased their hunger when the war chief hurled 2000 of his men into the very heart of their camp. The gunners were driven from the artillery, so closely pressed the throngs of savages,

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wielding their ponderous swords and lances, amid flights of triple-pointed darts and flint-tipped arrows that darkened the sky. The battle raged for hours; the carnage in the Tlascalan ranks was awful; but all day long the Indians stood their ground, retiring only at the approach of night. How many Tlascalans fell that day is not known; but, despite the overwhelming odds, only two Spaniards were killed, though seventy were wounded.

Next day, at dawn, the foes returned to the fight, preceded by flights of darts and arrows, with war-cries and shrill yells rending the air, swords and lances gleaming. They hurled themselves against the Spanish phalanx, but were repulsed again and again, leaving thousands of dead and wounded on the field.

The war chief consulted his astrologers, and was told that he could not conquer the strangers by day, since they were "children of the sun," with whose going their own strength waned; consequently, his only hope for victory lay in a night attack. This he promptly made, but with most disastrous results, for Cortés had his cavalry in readiness, and not only repulsed the Indians, but pursued them by moonlight through the cornfields, effecting great slaughter.

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Xicotencatl then changed his tactics from open battle to covert attack. After putting to death his false astrologers, he sent an embassy consisting of fifty persons, with gifts of fruit, bread, fowls, and four old women for sacrifice.

They soon learned that Cortés was no benignant *teule*, for, having been told by his interpreters that these men were spies sent by Xicotencatl to pave the way for another attack, he ordered their hands cut off, and, thus cruelly mutilated, sent them back to the chief with a message of defiance: "Come by night, or come by day, you shall ever find me prepared for battle; and if after two days you do not appear, we will seek you out at your post!"

This message was sheer bravado; but it had its effect, for, notwithstanding the soldiers all confessed their sins to the reverend fathers that night, expecting nothing short of extermination next morning, a change appeared in the enemies' attitude. It was not then known to the invaders that there were two parties in the Tlascalan senate: one for war, one for peace, or at least for allowing the Spaniards to pass without detention. The peace party, led by Prince

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Maxicatzin, finally prevailed upon the others to consent to an embassy, accepting the terms which, after every battle, Cortés had offered them.

The brief but bloody war was ended. A treaty was concluded, on the arrival at camp of the venerable caciques composing the Tlascalan senate, by which they recognized the great monarch beyond the sea, in whose name Cortés fought the heathen and won his victories. And that treaty was never broken by the Tlascalans, who kept faith with the Spaniards even when to do so was against their own interests.

The war chief promised Cortés an enduring peace and an eternal alliance, in the name of his people, and was assured by him that he expected nothing else at that time. When a small present of gold and cotton mantles was proffered, with an apology for its meanness (owing to the poverty of the country), Cortés accepted it, he said, for the good-will it implied, and nothing else. He could appear really great at times, and this was one of the occasions when he rose above himself. It is probable that the hard knocks he had received were having their effect in forging a more liberal



## ENCOUNTERS WITH TLASCALANS

policy than that with which he started out.

All these occurrences—the battles, skirmishes, embassies—had consumed more than three weeks. During this time the Spaniards had received two visits from ambassadors of Montezuma, whose fears were excited by the reports of great victories, and the continual advance of the strangers towards his capital. The first deputation bore presents to the value of 1000 crowns, and the second gold to the amount of 3000 ounces, besides hundreds of rich mantles and feather ornaments.

Montezuma, still puzzled over the mission of the Spaniards, and yet undecided how to treat them, pursued the very worst policy he could have adopted. He sent rich presents, yet requested them to leave the country at once; but every gift was an earnest of his enormous wealth, and a direct bribe for them to seek it out for their own enrichment.

The Mexican ambassadors warned the Spaniards against Tlascalan wiles, cautioning them to retrace their steps before it was too late, and by no means to trust themselves in their enemies' capital. But Cortés, while listening politely to their words, formed his

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own resolution in secret, giving each party credit (he says) for more friendship towards him than the other. Invited to their capital city by the nobles, Cortés, after due deliberation, set forth for the heart of the republic he and his gallant men had won to their cause, undeterred alike by the warnings of the Mexicans and the multitudes of Tlascala's soldiery.

They were met at the city gate by the four great nobles constituting the government, who, with every sign of affection, conducted them to lodgings in spacious quarters. Each soldier was given a pallet of *nequen*, or aloe fibre, to sleep on, there being a scarcity of cotton in the land—to such an extent, indeed, that the nobles and their friends eagerly accepted and divided among themselves the garments of this material which had been sent by Montezuma to the Spaniards.

## IX

### A MASSACRE IN THE HOLY CITY

1519

SEPTEMBER 23, 1519, was a day of triumph for the Spaniards and of festivity for the Tlascalans, who poured forth from their dwellings and welcomed the conquerors with offerings of food and flowers. Banquets were given in the four different sections of the city controlled by their respective governors, who, the following day, brought to Cortés five lovely damsels, and besought him to choose one lady for himself and bestow the others upon his officers.

This was the third time such an alliance had been forced upon Cortés and his friends, the others occurring with the Tabascans and the Cempoallans. The commander improved this occasion, as he had before, by refusing the proffered hostages until they should have been baptized and cleansed of paganism. He also delivered an excellent dis-

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course upon the monstrous features of their religion, especially their worship of idols and human sacrifices. Warmed by his discourse, Cortés was on the point of ordering another idol-smashing foray, as at Cempoalla, but he compromised with the chiefs when they set free the slaves they held in cages as sacrificial victims. The Tlascalan nobles had the same answer to his arguments as the Totonacs: that their gods had been good to them, that they had given them victories over their foes, and abundant harvests. To destroy them would not only show themselves ungrateful, but would excite distrust in the minds of the younger generation. They were willing, however, to give his God a place in their pantheon, being liberal in the extreme, and "by no means prejudiced against the deities of other people." The next day a temple was cleared and cleansed, an altar was erected, and the Indian maidens baptized, after which they were assigned to their new lords and masters.

The visitor to historic Tlascala to-day will find few vestiges of the city with 40,000 inhabitants, described by Cortés, for the entire province hardly contains that number now; but some interesting memorials of the Span-

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ish invasion are still preserved. About two miles distant from the city walls stands the church of San Estevan, which is said to cover the site of Xicotencatl's palace. In the municipal hall are portraits of the four nobles as they appeared before Cortés in 1519; inside an old church stands the great stone font from which they were baptized in 1520; and here, also, is preserved the veritable banner carried by the Spaniards in Mexico. The nobles would not abjure their idols and their religion, by command of Cortés, but when he returned to Tlascala, after his defeat by the Aztecs, the aged senators, instead of upbraiding him for the sacrifice of their soldiery, presented themselves for baptism in token of sympathy and friendship.

But we can linger no longer with Cortés in Tlascala, where he remained twenty days, resting and refreshing his soldiers. Though the natives would have had him and his men make the republic their abiding-place, and offered him every inducement to remain, he was inflexibly determined to seek out Montezuma and enter his capital. The Aztec emperor had changed his policy, for, rather than have the Spaniards league with his

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deadly enemies (as now seemed probable they would do), he no longer opposed their entrance into the valley of Mexico, but sent an embassy inviting them to Aztlan, with still more gold and merchandise to the value of 10,000 crowns. Cortés had long since become convinced that the Mexican king's resources were really inexhaustible, and nothing on earth should prevent him from seeing for himself.

Cholula was one of Mexico's most ancient cities, perhaps coeval in its foundation with those venerable remains which are to be seen at Palenque, at Copan, and in Yucatan; and more, it was the reputed residence of Quetzalcoatl, his last abiding-place before he left the country. He, it was said, taught the Toltecs the arts that had descended to the Cholulans of the sixteenth century, who excelled in the cutting of gems and the making of beautiful pottery and feather-work.

This holy city of the Aztecs lay about six leagues distant from Tlascala, and when first seen by the Spaniards contained more than 20,000 houses and 400 mosques or temples (wrote Cortés, in his second letter to Charles V.). Towering above the plain, and overtopping all other structures in Cholula, stood

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(as it stands to-day) the famed temple-pyramid of the Feathered Serpent, an artificial hill 200 feet in height and 1000 feet square at the base.

There was no sign of treachery or enmity in the faces of the happy people who welcomed Cortés and his company with acclaim; but the priests, like those of Tlascala, refused to prostrate their idols and abase their religion—the most ancient in the land—at his command. Finally, the alert and inquisitive Malinche, mistress of Cortés, having acquired the confidence of a cacique's wife, was told by her that the Cholulans had planned a massacre and urged her to secure a refuge in her house. Malinche (Doña Marina) promptly informed her master, and, the provisions hitherto supplied by the city authorities failing at this time, he called a council of his officers. Two native priests were brought before them, who confessed that Montezuma had been assured by his gods that the Spaniards were to be delivered into his hands at Cholula, while the chief cacique had received from the king the gift of a golden drum, which indicated promotion and preference.

Condemned without a hearing, foredoomed

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to furnish themselves victims for a massacre, instead of their guests, most of the Cholulan nobility were enticed within the walls of a great court, where the Spaniards were quartered. Then the gates were closed and the slaughter began, at a signal, which was the firing of an arquebuse.

"We were all prepared for what was to be done," wrote one of those who took part in the massacre. "The soldiers, armed with sword and buckler, were placed at the gate of the great court, in order to prevent any from escaping, and our general was on horseback attended by a strong guard."

When he saw the people crowding in at the gate he said: "How anxious are these traitors to feast upon our flesh. . . . But God will disappoint them!" He then caused the signal to be given, and the blood-thirsty soldiers fell upon the defenceless throng like wolves upon a flock of lambs. Mingled with the roar of cannon and musketry were the death-shrieks of men, women, and children, murdered by the thousand. Blood ran in streams, the dead were piled high in heaps, and such unfortunates as survived were afterwards burned alive.

In all, it is said, more than 6000 Cholulans



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were murdered on this lamentable occasion. Aside from those killed by the Spanish murderers in the court, thousands perished outside, in the city streets and in the country, slaughtered by the fierce Tlascalans, who, by invitation of Cortés, took part in the massacre and gratified their thirst for blood.

The termination of this terrible battle was at the pyramid of Quetzalcoatl, up the terraced sides of which the combined force of Spaniards and Tlascalans pursued the desperate Cholulans. At the summit was a gigantic effigy of the "God of Peace," adorned with gems, around his neck a collar of precious stones, spouting from his diadem the feathery flames that signified his attributes. Around their god the Cholulans gathered in a last attempt to repel the invaders. They cast down javelins and burning arrows, stones and timbers from the ruin of their temple; but nothing could stay the progress of those invincible soldiers clad in steel. They halted not until the last miserable defender had been thrown from the pyramid and the city was wrapped in flames.

The distance in time which separates us from both Cortés and Montezuma relieves us from the necessity of apologizing for the acts

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of either; but, notwithstanding the labored attempts of the conqueror's biographers to vindicate his acts, the impression has remained throughout the centuries that there was no real excuse for his dreadful deeds at Cholula. In fact, no proof was ever adduced that a rising was meditated by the Cholulans; and whether the horrible massacre may be regarded as justifiable, depends upon the point of view taken by the reader, and hence is not open to argument. But whatever injuries Cortés had inflicted, he had surely acquired prestige in Mexico. He had caused Montezuma to tremble on his throne, and his subjects to quake at the mere mention of the invading *teules*, who, now, departing from the sacred city of Cholula, set their faces sternly towards Tenochtitlan.

'Twixt Cholula's temple-pyramid and the capital of Aztlan, a distance of about seventy miles intervened. The route was rugged, and part of the way was difficult, lying between the great volcanoes Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, whose snow-covered peaks are visible from both centres of population. They are the mightiest peaks in Mexico, and form part of that vast mountain system which encloses and isolates the great valley of Ana-

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huac, in the centre of which lay the island-capital, Tenochtitlan, the ancient "city of the Cactus Rock." This city had been founded by the Aztecs about the year 1325 and had waxed great and powerful. Its rulers had extended their sway, under the conquests of successive kings, from ocean to ocean, and from its northernmost border southward to the confines of Guatemala.

The only independent people, not subject more or less directly to the Mexicans, or Aztecs, were the Tlascalans, 6000 of whose warriors accompanied Cortés on the march from Cholula, as soldiers and burden-bearers. They took the place of the retiring Totonacs, who were sent back to the coast, scantily rewarded for their arduous services from the abundance of clothing donated to Cortés by Montezuma, and which the shivering allies gladly accepted in lieu of gold. The Indians from Cuba had all perished of cold and privation, so the acquisition by the Spaniards—first of the Totonacs, then of the Tlascalans—was a stroke of great good-fortune.

From the summit-platform of the great pyramid at Cholula, where anciently stood the God of Plumes and burned the perpetual fire in his honor, a view is outspread which

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affords one of the world's most glorious prospects, for it rises from the centre of a vast and fertile plain and is overlooked by the great, snow - crested volcanoes. After crossing the beautiful plain with which Cholula was encompassed, the army entered the gloomy forests that clothed the shoulders of and filled the gap between those grim giants Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl, or the "Woman in White" and the "Hill that Smokes."

Two trails were open to the Spaniards, and Cortés chose the longer of the two, though it was then obstructed with rocks and fallen tree-trunks, by order (he was told) of Montezuma, who desired him to take the other route, somewhere along which he had an ambuscade prepared for his destruction.

Colder and colder became the air, chilled as it was by the everlasting snows that cover the volcano-peaks. The trail, or road, crossed the gap at an altitude of 14,000 feet. From its highest point several of the Spaniards made an attempt to gain the crater-brim of Popocatepetl—in which they succeeded, to the amazement of the natives, who were greatly impressed by this daring feat (the first of the kind, perhaps, ever known to them). The army passed the night housed

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in great stone shelters which had been erected for the lodging of travellers, and the next morning, after having been chilled to the bone, crossed the crest of Ahualco, from which the first view was afforded them of the valley of Mexico. It is a glorious prospect, that which opens to the traveller over the Popocatepetl trail from the elevated slopes of Ahualco, and should have impressed even those sordid fortune-hunters under command of Cortés. But they have left no record of their sensations at beholding the beautiful panorama unfolded before their eyes, like a distant vision of paradise — that vast expanse of upland valley, dotted with forests, lakes, towns, all encircling and tributary to the great gem in the centre, the city of the isle and cactus rock, Tenochtitlan. They had not come to view scenery, but were there for spoils; and there were many among them who wished most ardently (as they saw the numerous cities set out before them, and the vast valley teeming with people, who might soon be enemies in conflict) that they could be swiftly transported back to Cuba.

It was now too late to recede, and the only thought that animated the bravest of the company was what rich booty the sacking

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of those populous cities would afford. There were many thousands of people, to be sure; but, as the Spanish proverb has it, "*Mas Moros mas ganancia*" (the more Moors the greater the spoil), they muttered in their beards. Thus they blew upon their courage to warm it, inwardly quaking at their temerity in bearding the Aztec lion in his den, swarming as it was with brave though servile subjects.

## X

### IN THE CITY OF MEXICO

1519

“**M**ALINTZIN,” said the spokesman of a deputation of noble lords, sent by Montezuma to meet Cortés with rich gifts, “these presents our monarch sends you, saying how grieved he is that you should take such trouble in coming from a distant country to see him. As he has already told you, he will give gold, silver, and gems for you and your *teules*, on condition that you will abandon your intention and not approach any nearer his capital. He now repeats this request, and promises that he will send after you a great treasure of gold and jewels for your king, four loads of gold for yourself, and a load for each of your brethren, on the condition that you return at once.”

Cortés thanked the ambassadors most courteously for their gifts and those conditionally promised, which would have amount-

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ed to more than \$1,000,000 in value; but, he said, he was still determined upon keeping on until the object of his long and toilsome journey should be reached. He was surprised, he continued, to find the great Montezuma so variable, first inviting him to his court, then desiring him to depart, without so much as a glimpse of his glorious countenance. He respectfully submitted, to them and to him, that he could not now turn back, being pledged to his sovereign to proceed and deliver his message at court.

No course was open to the Spaniards now but to proceed, even though a rumor was circulated in the ranks that it was Montezuma's intention to permit them to enter the city and then put them all to death. "And being like other mortals," says one of the soldiers, "and desirous to live, it filled us with melancholy thoughts."

Still, on they marched, first halting at the town of Amecameca, then at Tlalmanalco (two towns founded by the Aztecs, which yet exist), where they rested and refreshed themselves during two days and nights, being well received by the caciques, who gave them food as well as gold. Passing thence through plantations of maize and maguey, the little



## IN THE CITY OF MEXICO

band came to Chalco, a town near the first of that chain of lakes so famous in Mexico's history. Here the night was passed, and next morning word came to Cortés by courier that Montezuma's nephew, Cacamatzin, king of Tezcoco, was approaching, and the army was drawn up to receive him. Six native nobles bore his palanquin, which was adorned with feathers, gold, and gems, and others swept the ground over which he passed.

The Spaniards were favorably impressed by the king of Tezcoco, whose magnificence gave assurance of what was in store for them at Montezuma's court, and falling into line they marched along with elastic step. The die was cast and they were already in the trap—if trap there were—set by the Mexicans for their capture, having sprung it themselves when they crossed the mountain ridge and left that barrier behind them.

Skirting the southeastern shore of Lake Chalco, at a town (still existing) known as Ayocingo, they took the causeway for a small island where stood a city called Cuitlahuac (to-day it is Tlahuac) which, with its white and glistening houses of stone and its blossoming gardens, struck them as exceed-

## HERNANDO CORTÉS

ingly beautiful. Across the lake, northward, led another stone causeway, broad enough for eight horsemen to ride abreast, which ended at Iztapalapan, a city containing sev-



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eral thousand dwellings and stone palaces with massive cedar beams, set amid gardens of flowers. Montezuma's brother was governor here, and in one of the vast halls of his palace he had gathered many lords of in-

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ferior cities to assist him in welcoming the Spaniards, who were given a banquet and sumptuously entertained.

The great city of Mexico, also known as Tenochtitlan, the Heart of Anahuac, and Aztlan, was distinctly visible from Iztapalapan, and was pointed out by the Mexican nobles, who had no occasion to magnify its wonders, which were perfectly apparent to the astonished strangers. Founded 200 years before, on an island in the salt lake, Tezcoco, the Aztec city had grown with great rapidity, long since having spread beyond its original limits. Three wide causeways and an aqueduct, all solidly built of stone and mortar, connected with the main-land around the lake, north, south, and west. Easterly lay the bulk of Tezcoco's waters, across which, on the farther shore, gleamed the towers and temples of a city bearing the same name as the lake.

The causeway connecting Iztapalapan with the capital was six miles in length and eight yards in breadth. It ran straight as an arrow's flight to the great city's central square, whence it was prolonged on its northern side to the main-land at Tepeyacac, where to-day stands the sacred shrine of Guadalupe.

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About a mile from the southern shore the causeway was joined by another from the town of Coyoacan, and at their juncture stood a small but very strong stone fort, with walls ten feet high to the battlements and surrounded with a moat crossed by draw-bridges. All three causeways, in fact, were frequently cut by broad canals or ditches, spanned by wooden bridges, which could be raised at will, and thus, for a time at least, prevent the advance or retreat of an enemy so rash as to venture upon those narrow structures of stone amid the waters.

Cortés and his men realized perfectly the risks they ran in taking this isolated highway, with the waters on either side alive with Indian canoes, a fortified city in front of them, and their retreat cut off by the gaps of open water that the raising of the bridges would reveal. The brave commander's eagle glance took in all this; but, nevertheless, he still advanced, impelled by a soldier's pride, perhaps also by a holy zeal for the conversion of the Mexicans. Led by him, forced to act against their own judgment by him, the army took the road for Aztlan's capital, by the way of Mexicalzinco, with the salt Tezcoco on one side of their narrow causeway and

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the fresh waters of Chalco on the other. The air was soft, the scenery enchanting. On every side were natural objects of wonderful beauty, and architectural works showing taste and refinement. Above all other things which excited the wonder of these rude soldiers were the beautiful *chinampas*, or floating gardens, on the bosom of Lake Chalco, made of matted vegetation, woven together with vines, covered with earth, and supporting growing plants bearing fruits and flowers for the markets of Mexico.

The people of Aztlan, or Aztec land, pressed forward by thousands to witness the advance of this grim body of warriors, scant 500 strong, cleaving the throngs like a wedge—a living wedge—which at no distant day was to split the Mexican empire in twain! The common soldiers kept their eyes upon their leader, who rode proudly at their head, the life, the soul, the animating purpose of that amazing expedition. Close after him came the cavalry, the horses' iron hoofs ringing loudly on the stones of the causeway. Next to the cavalry, the iron guns drawn by the allies attracted the dazed attention of the Aztecs, as the artillery went rumbling and rattling over the road. Then came the

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arquebusiers, with their matchlocks: few in number, these musketeers, but grim and stern-looking in their bonnets and corselets of steel. After them strode the swordsmen and halberdiers, or pikemen, comprising the infantry and the bulk of the soldiery.

All were lithe and sinewy men, for the weaklings had been weeded out long since by the grim Reaper with his sickle of death. Only strong men and stalwart were there, for the bearing of their armor (whether of steel or quilted cotton and iron) was a burden for any able-bodied soldier. Their helms flashed back the morning sunshine, as well as sword-hilt and halberd-head, breastplate, arquebuse, and battle-axe. Compact and perfectly drilled, swayed by one impulse, one resistless will, these mailed monsters, as they marched along with ring of steel and rattle of accoutrements, must have appeared to the wondering natives what they nearly were — invincible. They excited the awed wonder of the thronging Mexicans, between whose serried ranks they broke their way — a wonder too deep for any other sensation to affect them — until the thousand Tlascalans who came trooping after, darting their

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fierce glances right and left, stirred their deep hatred and resentment.

The army came to Xoloc, where the small fort stood at the juncture of the causeways, and Cortés noted swiftly its strategic advantages, which the following year he used so well in his siege of the city. Here the Spaniards halted, while 1000 or more of the Mexican nobility trooped past them, each noble with a salute for Cortés, as commander, consisting of a deep obeisance, and kissing one hand, after first touching it to the earth. Thus passed more than an hour, when, this barbaric ceremony being ended, the army moved on again towards the city, arrived near the great gate of which announcement was made by messengers that Montezuma was approaching. The nobles hastened to meet their sovereign lord, and Cortés, dismounting from his horse, threw the bridle-reins to a page and advanced to greet the emperor.

No horse had he, the great Montezuma, whose slightest wish was law throughout an ocean-bounded realm, nor had he ever seen one before that day on which he met the invaders of his capital. He rode upon the shoulders of his subjects, in a litter (or palan-



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quin) dazzling in its adornments, descending from which, and leaning on the arms of two attendant princes, he revealed himself at last to the rash stranger who had so persistently sought him.

That was another triumph for Cortés: to be received on an equality with kings, though coming in the character of ambassador. He had won the respect, had compelled the admiration, of the greatest monarch any Spaniard had ever approached in the New World called America.

The emperor appeared to be about forty years of age, was tall and spare, with a coppery complexion and sparse beard. His eyes were dark and melancholy, his hair black and coarse, worn long and flowing. His head was adorned with a rude tiara of gold and a panache of green plumes, the insignia of his military rank. His embroidered *tilmatli*, or Aztec cloak, was trimmed with pearls and *chalchiuittls*, as also were his buskins or sandals, the soles of which were of gold. The precious metal was conspicuous, not only on his royal person, but on the palanquin in which he arrived, with pillars plated with gold and feathered canopy.

Advancing towards each other, king and





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conqueror met and exchanged greetings. Cortés, in his disregard of the dignity that hedged about the sovereign, would have embraced him, after the effusive Spanish custom, but was halted half-way by the horrified attendants. He, however, hung around the emperor's neck a collar of pearls and diamonds (false, like his own pretensions), which he had the audacity—the impudence, even—to beg Montezuma to accept in the name of his sovereign.

The really great and generous Montezuma little cared for the value of a gift, preferring rather to give than to receive, and so, without more than a glance at the collar, he ordered one of his retinue to present Cortés with two necklaces of mother-of-pearl with pendants of golden crayfish beautifully wrought. The two chief personages in this interchange of civilities then held brief converse through the interpreters. Cortés remarked (and truthfully) that he rejoiced in having at last seen so great a monarch, and that he felt highly honored by his attentions. Montezuma responded graciously, and, having given orders for the princes of Tezcoco and Coyoacan to attend his guests to the quarters prepared for them in the city, he re-entered his

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palanquin and returned to his palace, guarded by his nobles, and between double ranks of cringing subjects.

Greatly elated, Cortés and his soldiers followed close behind, with drums beating, trumpets sounding, and colors fluttering, all their recent misgivings swept away, their hopes in the ascendant. For had not the mighty Montezuma received them with greatest honor and their chief with all the distinction of royalty itself? There was no talk now of going back to Cuba, for all were exultant as, treading lightly to the sound of martial music, they entered the city through the southern gate. They marched straight down the central avenue leading to the great plaza, on either side vast, massive palaces frowned down upon by the *teocallis*, or temple-pyramids, their summits smoking with the fires of sacrifice.

At the entrance to an immense structure on the western side of the plaza they found Montezuma and his suite awaiting them. Taking Cortés by the hand, the emperor said, "Malintzin, here you and your friends are now at home; enter and repose yourselves after the fatigue of your march." He then departed for his palace, prom-

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ising to return after the Spaniards had rested.

The building assigned to the army of guests whom Montezuma was called upon to entertain was formerly the palace of his father, King Axayacatl. Its vast size may be inferred from the fact that within its walls ample accommodations were found for all the Spaniards as well as their allies. The apartment reserved for Cortés was hung with cotton tapestries, golden-fringed, its floor covered with rushes as mats, and set about with wooden stools.

Refreshments were awaiting their arrival, and after the grim battalions had filed in and had been assigned to quarters, after cannon had been posted at the gates and sentinels on the parapets, Cortés ordered a salute fired from the artillery, as a sign of triumph, and in order to terrify the Mexicans, who swarmed about the palace in wonder and amaze. It was a rude return for Montezuma's gracious hospitalities, and it was not the last of its kind: but the roar of the cannon reverberating through the streets and squares served the purpose intended by Cortés, and was sufficiently terrifying to the astonished Aztecs. Never before in the 200 years of

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its existence had the Aztec city heard such sounds, nor had it ever before been invaded by soldiers in armor, bearing weapons that evoked the thunder and the lightning.

## XI

### AT MONTEZUMA'S COURT

1519

THE Spaniards made their memorable entry into Montezuma's capital on November 8, 1519, seven months after their arrival on the coast of Mexico. On the day following, attended by four of his captains and five soldiers, Cortés set out for the palace of Montezuma, which occupied an extensive area on the opposite side of the square. The emperor received his visitors graciously, placing Cortés at his right hand, and soon showed great curiosity concerning the land from which the Spaniards had come to Mexico, their origin, and especially the great ruler whom they professed to serve.

He still held to the theory that they were, perhaps, related in some manner to the God of Air, whose coming the Mexicans had so long expected, and appealed to Cortés for in-

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formation. The crafty conqueror (having now an inkling of the importance and significance of this connection) eagerly assured him that he was correct; but he could not explain to Montezuma's satisfaction how it was that disciples of the Prince of Peace should have appeared (as they had) with fire and sword. After Cortés had concluded his address, with the assurance that the Spaniards worshipped "the only true God," while the gods of the Aztecs were false, and would lead them "into everlasting flames," there was silence for a space, then Montezuma replied: "Malintzin, I have already heard, through my ambassadors, of those things you now mention, and to which hitherto we have made no reply, because we from the first worshipped the gods we now do, and consider them just and good. So, no doubt, are yours. In regard to the creation of the world, our beliefs are the same, and we also believe that you are the people who were to come to us from where the sun rises. To your great king I feel indebted. There have been already persons on our coasts from your country; I wish to know if you are the same people?"

Cortés answered that they were all sub-



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jects of the same sovereign, and Montezuma continued that from the very first he had desired to see them, which privilege his gods had now granted him. They should therefore consider themselves perfectly at home, and if ever they were refused entrance into any of his cities it would not be his fault, but that of his subjects, who were terrified by the reports they had heard: such as that they carried with them the thunder and lightning; that their horses killed men, and that they were furious *teules* with blood in their eyes.

Throughout the interview—and, in fact, during all his intercourse with the Spaniards—Montezuma was extremely affable, and yet bore himself with dignity. Just before his visitors took their departure he made a sign to his officials, who brought in ten loads of rich mantles, which, together with as many collars of gold and golden ornaments, he divided among his guests. “The gold alone amounted to above 1000 crowns,” says one of them, “and he gave it with an affability and indifference which made him appear a truly magnificent prince. . . . We then retired, impressed with respect for the great Montezuma, his princely manners and liberality.”

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The "great Montezuma," and a "truly magnificent prince," he may well have been termed, not only because of his kinglike greatness and air of majesty, but on account of the regal luxuriousness of his surroundings. The palace in which he had received the Spaniards was but one of many which he owned, yet this vast structure contained more than a hundred rooms, and three interior courts, or patios, adorned with fountains, flowers, and cages filled with beautiful birds. One of its reception halls was finished in marbles and jasper, and could hold 3000 persons. The roofs of the palace were flat and battlemented, with ample space (the Spaniards said) for them all to hold a tourney.

A thousand people is a goodly number for even a royal household to contain, but that of Montezuma boasted this large retinue; while his cooks, of whom he had scores, could serve his meats in thirty different styles. Three hundred dishes were prepared for his table alone, and for his guards above a thousand. The royal table was set with snowy napery and the earthen-ware of Cholula, while for finger-bowls four beautiful women presented the emperor with *xicales*,

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or calabashes, containing perfumed water for laving his hands.

Torches of aromatic wood diffused a grateful fragrance while they burned above the board, and gilded screens of wood were placed so as to shield his majesty from the vulgar gaze. Although he could command a profusion of viands, Montezuma ate but sparingly, his favorite food being fruits and vegetables, and his drink the Mexican *pulque* (pronounced póol-kay) and chocolate. Fifty cups of chocolate were usually served at a meal, and while he sipped it he was amused by singers and dancers, sometimes by acrobats and jesters. After the chocolate came tobacco, the smoke of which he inhaled through hollow canes or reeds, and immediately upon the conclusion of the repast he took his siesta.

There was a daily interchange of visits after the Spaniards had made themselves "at home" in the palace of Axayacatl, and on the fourth day Cortés and his staff went out to inspect the great temple-pyramid, the *teocalli*, which rose to a height of more than 100 feet above the plaza. Montezuma met them by appointment, having been conveyed thither in his palanquin, and when

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arrived at the summit-platform of the vast pyramidal structure of stone took Cortés by the hand and pointed out to him, the various objects of interest in and about the city.

The glorious view outspread before the Spaniards that day—at least its natural features—may be seen from the bell-towers of the great cathedral, which was later erected on the site of the *teocalli*. Environed on every side by great mountain ranges, the valley of the table-land, 8000 feet above the sea, stretched away as far as eye could see. Westward rose the sacred “Hill of the Grasshopper,” *Chapoltepec*, which may be seen to-day, as then, covered with groves of giant cypresses.

Directly at the feet of the mailed conquerors lay the city, with its great squares and straight, wide streets; its palaces, market-places, pyramidal temples and towers. They had passed through the largest of the markets, known as the *tianguis*, where they were struck with admiration of its system and orderly arrangement, and the profusion of supplies from every zone.

Near the great pyramid was another temple, containing the skeletons of sacrificial victims who had perished in the past, where

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skulls were piled up (one of the conquerors avers) to the number of 136,000. A great wall surrounded the vast enclosure, pierced by four gateways, above which were chambers used as the royal armory. Here were collections of barbaric weapons which had been accumulated during many years.

There were wonders on every side, such as the great towers and smoking *teocallis*. The bosom of the lake was animated with thousands of Indians in canoes; the noise of the great market could be heard miles away; but the Spaniards on the temple-platform scarce gave heed to all these, so amazed and horrified were they at what they beheld immediately about them. They had ascended to the platform of the temple by climbing more than 100 steps, which wound around its terraced sides in successive stages. The first object that stared them in the face was grim old Huitzilopochtli, or Mexitli, the Aztec war-god, in whose name and before whom all the bloody sacrifices took place. He had a "great face and terrible eyes," says one of the party that day; "his figure was entirely covered with gold and jewels, his body bound with golden serpents; in his right hand he held a bow and in his left a

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bundle of arrows. Before this idol was a pan of incense, with three human hearts burning as an offering. Near him stood another hideous idol, Tezcatlipoca, or the god of the infernal regions, with a countenance like a bear and great, shining eyes of the polished substance (*iztli*, or obsidian) whereof their mirrors are made." Both great idols overlooked the Sacrificial Stone, nine feet in diameter, three feet in height, with a sculptured border of conquering kings. This stone had a deep bowl in its centre, with a channel leading from it to the edge, through which flowed the blood of the victims.

It was upon this stone that the high-priests of Montezuma's charnel-house threw the human victims selected for sacrifice, with knives of obsidian cut open their breasts, and then tore out their hearts, which they offered to those great stone idols looking on in grim approval. More than 60,000 victims were sacrificed here in a single year, tradition relates, and for how many years no chronicle can tell.

Would you see these objects that Cortés gazed upon that day when, with Montezuma, he ranged the temple-pyramid nearly 400 years ago? Then go to Mexico, seek the

## AT MONTEZUMA'S COURT

great museum of its capital city, and there you will find them: grim Huitzilopochtli, bear-faced Tezcatlipoca, the blood-stained Sacrificial Stone, and hundreds of the *tepitones*, or little gods, which had their places in the Aztec pantheon.

So accustomed to these hideous objects was Montezuma that he calmly went about among them, pointing out their excellences, and with no misgiving, apparently, except as to the manner in which they would be received by his guests. He could not but observe their horrified looks and their disgust; but these he ignored, until finally Cortés, unable longer to endure the bloody scenes, reasoned with him upon the folly, the wickedness, of adoring such hideous images. "I wonder," he said, "that a monarch so wise as you are can worship as gods those abominable figures of the devil."

He tried to treat the whole thing as a grim and ghastly joke, speaking half-jestingly, but Montezuma was grieved and shocked. He looked at Cortés in wonder, then sadly answered: "If I had known that you would have spoken so lightly of my gods, I should not have allowed you to visit the platform of my temple. Go, now, to your quarters;

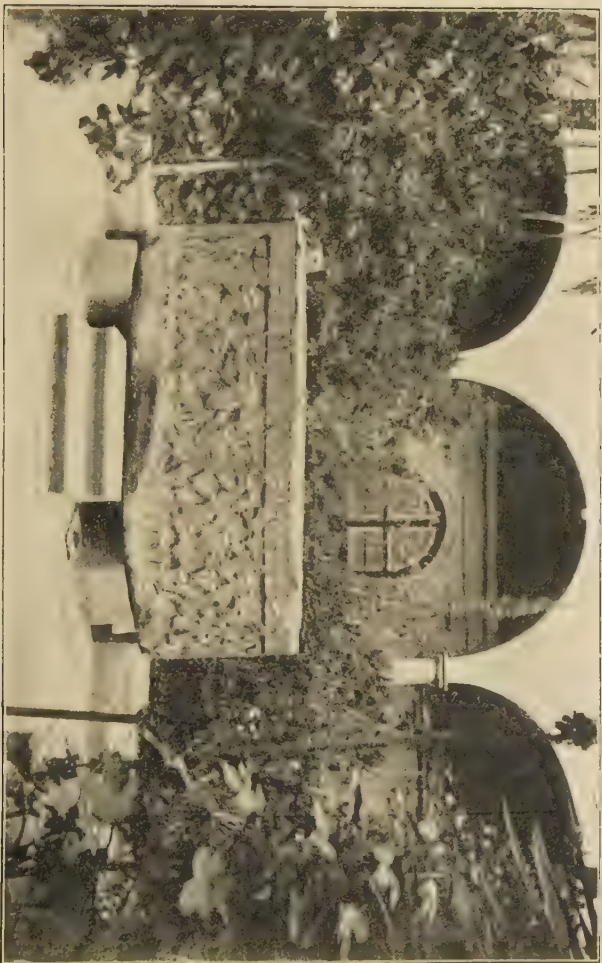
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go in peace, while I remain to appease the anger of our gods." He spoke calmly, but his eyes flashed angrily, and as the priests of the temple, their hair matted with gore, and their black robes stained with human blood, began to gather ominously, the Spaniards beat a retreat to their quarters in the palace.

It had been the intention of Cortés to apply to Montezuma for space upon the pyramid-platform in which to erect a chapel, but from this he was dissuaded. When, however, he asked permission to erect an altar in Axayacatl's palace, it was gladly given by the emperor, who furnished workmen and materials, so that in three days a separate apartment was provided for the purpose. Sounding the walls for a niche in which to place the cross, the workmen found a concealed door, which, when opened, revealed a room filled with gold, gems, silver, jewels, feather-work and gorgeous fabrics. "We there saw riches without end," wrote Diaz, the conqueror, "and I thought that if all the treasures of the earth had been brought into one place they could not have amounted to so much."

The secret of the treasure-house soon spread abroad, and every soldier as well as





THE SACRIFICIAL STONE



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officer in the command got a glimpse of it. They could scarce keep themselves from appropriating and sharing it then and there, but by orders of Cortés the wall was closed up again and the treasure left for "a more convenient season."

It may as well be stated here that Montezuma was later compelled to deliver up this treasure to the Spaniards, who broke up the beautiful ornaments and cast them into bars, which were stamped with the imperial arms. The articles of gold alone formed three great heaps, exclusive of the jewels, silver, pearls and feather-work, and the whole was valued at more than \$6,000,000.

The soldiers then considered themselves rich "beyond the dreams of avarice"; but they still had Cortés to reckon with, and this is how he divided that imperial loot: First, he laid aside a fifth for his majesty in Spain; then another fifth for himself. Of the remaining three-fifths a generous portion was set off to "reimburse the Cuban expedition," the expense of which had been mainly borne by Cortés; fourthly, for the expenses of the agents sent to Spain from Vera Cruz; fifthly, for the soldiers at Villa Rica; sixthly, for the horses killed in battle; seventhly, for

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the Rev. Father Olmedo and the captains; eighthly, double shares for the cavalry, musketeers, and cross-bowmen; ninthly, the foot-soldiers, whose shares by this time were hardly worth stooping for. In fact, out of that vast hoard, amounting to more than \$6,000,000, the infantry's share, as allotted by Cortés, was less than \$1000 to each soldier.

Little wonder that there were mutterings, loud and deep, that many of these heroes, upon whom the commander had relied in battle, and to whom he had made repeated promises of wealth and honors, were ready to return at once to the coast and to Cuba. Some of these Cortés quieted with gold, others with more promises; but they all knew him now as cunning, covetous, and mercenary.

At the end of a week the Spaniards had visited nearly every nook in the city, and the natives no longer paid attention to them, save to supply their wants by orders of Montezuma. They, as well as their allies, were tired of inaction, and the sight of the vast treasure having excited their cupidity, they were anxious to be off with it to a place of safety. These were the feelings of the

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rank and file. They were shared by their commander only in part. He desired not only treasure, but conquest, and the problem which confronted him was how to achieve the conquest of 300,000 people with less than 7000. His days and nights were full of anxiety, for he saw that, having hitherto played a deep, bold game, he could only win by artful strategy and yet bolder moves. The strategy of Cortés was subtle but shallow. The invasion of the capital appeared to have been a mistake; but a much greater one was his next move, which was the securing of Montezuma as a prisoner. By doing this, he argued, he might either remain in security or retreat in safety; but, in point of fact, he was unable to do either. Though the fears of the Spaniards may have suggested a possibility of treachery on the part of Montezuma, they could not point to a single act in proof of it. On the contrary, his conduct, and hitherto that of his nobles, had been exemplary. He had been generous beyond precedent, and had treated his uninvited guests with a consideration vastly greater than they deserved.

So Cortés cast about for a pretext, though, in truth, he was base enough and bold enough

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to proceed without one, and found it in an event which had occurred at Vera Cruz. The lord of a province contiguous to the Totonacs had tried to collect tribute of them in the name of Montezuma. The Spanish garrison at Villa Rica had gone to their assistance, but had been defeated with the loss of seven soldiers, including among them the commander, Juan de Escalante. One soldier had been captured alive and sent to Montezuma, but had died on the way. His head was cut off, however, and, as a hideous trophy, arrived in Mexico at the time Cortés and his men were in Cholula.

Cortés had knowledge of these things before he entered the capital, but he kept it to himself, biding his time. The time had now arrived, he believed, when Montezuma should be taxed with his treachery, and, confiding this sentiment to his captains, he secured their hearty assent. They resolved, in secret council, to seize the person of the emperor.

## XII

### MONTEZUMA A PRISONER

1519-1520

PRECEDED by the interpreters, Aguilar and Doña Marina, and attended by five of his captains, Cortés repaired to the palace of Montezuma, who received his visitors graciously, as usual, distributing presents and acting in a manner wholly void of suspicion. The accusation of the Spaniards came like a thunder-clap, and at first he was overcome with astonishment; but when Cortés declared that he must send for the guilty chief and his accomplices he assented at once. Attached to a bracelet on his wrist was the signet of Huitzilopochtli—the royal seal. Detaching this emblem of authority, he gave it to a noble of his court, with the command that he bring before him Cacique Qualpopoca (who had committed the deed) and those concerned with him in the attack upon the Spaniards.

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Having done this, he thought, of course, that Cortés would be satisfied; but though he expressed himself as well pleased, the conqueror declared that one thing more was necessary to placate his men and assure the safety of all. That was the removal of Montezuma and his court to Spanish quarters in the palace of Axayacatl. This astounding proposition, coming from strangers who had been less than ten days in his capital, and whose numbers were so far inferior to those of the Aztecs, nearly took Montezuma's breath away. When he had recovered speech he replied, indignantly: "When was there ever an instance of a king, a great ruler like myself, tamely suffering himself to be led into prison? And though I were willing to debase myself in so vile a manner, would not all my vassals at once arm themselves to set me free?"

Cortés replied with specious arguments, which the king refuted, until the captains standing by became very impatient. One of them, De Leon, cried out in a rough voice: "Why waste so many words on this barbarian? Let him this moment yield himself a prisoner or we will plunge our swords into his body. Tell him this, interpreter,



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and, also, that if he says a word he dies for it!"

Doña Marina softened this brutal speech as much as possible; but Montezuma knew from the captain's tone and gestures that his life was threatened, and this monarch of an almost limitless realm yielded to his fears.

"Then let us go," he said, with trembling voice. "I am willing to trust myself with you. Let us go, since my gods surely intend it!"

The news of his departure spread rapidly, and there was danger of an immediate uprising of the Mexicans, which was averted by Montezuma himself, who caused it to be proclaimed that he went with the Spaniards of his own free will. Entering his palanquin with royal state, attended by the nobles of his court, but closely guarded by the iron-willed conquerors, the emperor departed from his palace, which he was never again to enter alive.

An apartment was prepared in the palace of Axayacatl, hung with fine tapestries and furnished from the rooms he had abandoned. His hundreds of attendants waited around him as before, anticipating every want and serving him with eyes averted, still cringing

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before the deposed lord of Aztlan. Still, he was a prisoner, no longer in control of his own movements, and in effect imperious Cortés was absolute ruler over Mexico. The dominance of Cortés was made manifest to all in a terrible manner, upon the arrival of the officials charged with the capture of Qualpopoca, who reached the capital after an absence of fifteen days. Before Montezuma, himself a captive, the recreant cacique was taken. He was richly clad, but covered his costly robes with coarser garments of aloe fibre, and put off his shoes, as he appeared before his sovereign. Montezuma received him coldly, and delivered him up to Cortés, to be dealt with as a traitor to his king, though the unfortunate cacique had merely obeyed orders sent from Mexico, to have ignored which would have cost his life.

Qualpopoca, his son, and fifteen others with them received scant mercy at the hands of Cortés, who at once condemned them to death by *burning at the stake*. In the centre of the great plaza, a huge pile was made of the weapons found in the armories over the gateways. There were spears, javelins, bows, arrows—in fact, every sort of weapon known to the Aztecs, and, as they had been a long

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while accumulating, the wood of which they were made was dry and inflammable.

Soon the captives were enveloped in flames that leaped upward to the sky, sending huge volumes of smoke aloft, and proclaiming to the amazed inhabitants of Tenochtitlan another cruel deed committed by the invaders of their sacred capital.

Many a victim had perished by fire before in that city of the holy *teocallis*. The act itself did not excite the horror of the Aztecs, but the motive that inspired it roused them to transports of wrath and indignation. Then they heard that not only was their beloved, revered sovereign a prisoner, but that he had been put in irons while the dreadful deed was being consummated. Fetters had been placed upon his ankles, by order of Cortés, who, when all was over, hastened to apologize for this gratuitous affront. This act of his, in thus adding insult to deadly injury, seems incredible; but still more strange appears the fact that according to eye-witnesses Montezuma fell upon his neck in the extremity of his abasement and despair. He wept aloud, and to assuage his grief Cortés offered to allow him to return to his palace, knowing full well, however, that he would

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not dare place himself within the power of his indignant and disgusted nobles.

Montezuma was a prisoner, but he was allowed to wander at will throughout the palace, into the streets and to the lakes, where he frequently went to fish for water-fowl. He also attended to the worship of his gods in the great temple; but he was constantly guarded by his captors. His favorite resort was the grove of Chapoltepec, where he went to hunt, and one day he was taken thither by Cortés, in one of the brigantines the Spaniards had constructed, having obtained the iron-work from Vera Cruz and timbers from the royal forests.

Other amusements were provided for the captive monarch in order to divert his mind from dwelling upon his pitiable condition. A favorite game with him was that called *totoloque*, played with golden balls, two on a side: Montezuma, his nephew, Cortés, and Alvarado. When the Spaniards won they gave their winnings to the emperor's attendants, and when Montezuma was successful he bestowed his gains upon the soldiers of the guard.

Still, despite the air of peace and pleasure within the palace walls, there was great com-

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motion without. The crackling flames which had consumed the cacique and his friends, the billows of smoke from that fearful sacrifice, and, above all, the restraining of Montezuma a prisoner in his own capital, made a deep impression upon the Aztecs. But, accustomed to look to the emperor for commands, and by his imprisonment being made leaderless, they were for weeks and months uncertain what to do or how to act. This condition could not long exist, even in a country where the subjects were so abjectly servile as in Mexico, for the Aztecs were brave to recklessness.

A leader arose in the person of Cacamatzin, king of Tezcoco, the ancient city on the opposite shore of the lake. This city was at one time a rival of the capital in all that makes for barbaric greatness, for it possessed temples and palaces, towers, gardens, and pyramids, the ruins of which have excited the wonder and admiration of modern explorers. Its decay began during the reign of its last sovereign, Nezahualpilli, whose eldest son, Cacamatzin, came into the succession at his death. The king of Tezcoco's youngest son, Ixtlilxochitl, disputed the succession with his brother, but was driven to

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the mountains, where he intrenched himself with a large army. He was later of inestimable service to Cortés and the Spaniards during the siege of Mexico; but at this stage of the drama had not made his appearance prominently.

Having received information that his uncle, Montezuma, was a captive, and that the Spaniards had rifled the treasury of his ancestors, Cacamatzin sent word to the imprisoned sovereign that he should not forget he was a king, and if he persisted in allowing the strangers to rule him thus he had "no more spirit than a hen." This was true enough, but, though Montezuma allowed the Spaniards to rule him, he had by no means lost all prestige with his people. This he proved by effecting the capture of Cacamatzin in the same manner that he had compelled the unfortunate Qualpopoca to attend him at the capital and brought about his death. He gave to certain trusted officials the signet of the war-god, and they went secretly to Tezcoco, where they had the good-fortune to find Cacamatzin in conference with his chiefs in a kiosk bordering on the lake. By watching their opportunity they were enabled to drag him into their canoe, and then hastened

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back to the capital, where the illustrious prisoner was delivered over to Montezuma. After giving him a lecture on the folly and wickedness of opposing the wishes of his sovereign, the servile monarch gave him into the hands of Cortés, who at once placed him in prison. There he remained in irons for months, subject to insult, and daily expecting death, finally perishing in the retreat from Mexico on the "sorrowful night" of disaster.

We now see the triumphant Cortés, as king-maker and friend of royalty, in undisputed possession of Mexico. He had its hereditary sovereign in his grasp, also its revenues and its tributary lords, for, besides unseating the king of Tezcoco, he had seized the prince of Tlacopan (lord of another strong city in the valley) and the high-priest of Tlatelolco.

His next important step was to force from Montezuma an acknowledgment of allegiance and vassalage to Charles V., the emperor of Spain. Not alone from the pliant king, but from his nobles and the lords of distant provinces tributary to Mexico, was it his intention to exact homage and formal submission to the unknown sovereign of that far-distant land. For it was necessary that this should be done, in order to strengthen his cause at



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the Spanish court and secure the countenance of royal approval to actions which had been without the sanction, hitherto, of any who ranked him as superiors in power, civil or military.

The nobles yielded their allegiance to the new power, though reluctantly, with sighs and groans, weeping and lamentation, says an old historian. In their hearts they were unchanged, but they foresaw the downfall of their once mighty empire; they felt the disgrace attached to the enslavement of their sovereign, and they raged against the chains that he had assisted the Spaniards to forge upon their limbs.

After power—which he now had in great measure—Cortés reckoned gold as the “greatest thing in the world”; and his first act as virtual ruler of Mexico’s destinies was to ascertain the location of Montezuma’s mines, whence he drew the vast stores of precious metal he so lavishly squandered in the embellishment of his court and in gifts to the Spaniards.

By means of accurate maps made in the hieroglyphics of picture-writing, Montezuma freely showed his friend the original source of all his treasures. From one (as was repre-



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sented on the maps), he obtained the precious trogon feathers; from another, mother-of-pearl; from yet another, stores of precious woods and spices; but that which interested the conqueror most was the picture-map showing the deposits of gold. Guided by messengers furnished by Montezuma, men deputed by Cortés to ascertain the extent of his golden treasure travelled in safety to the most distant provinces of Mexico, returning with substantial evidences of their richness and also with wonderful tales of adventure.

This contribution from the rich mines and from the rivers with golden sands, added to the vast treasure obtained by the sacking of the palace, was almost incalculable. Yet it was freely offered by Montezuma as if of little value. "Take it," he said to Cortés. "Take this gold, which is all I can collect at such short notice, and also that treasure which I derived from my ancestors, and send it to your sovereign, with the message that this is the tribute of his vassal Montezuma!"

This gold from Montezuma (as stout old Bernal Diaz truly says) was "badly divided and worse employed," for many of the soldiers, who had "lined their pockets well,"

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plunged into the Spanish diversion of gambling, and deep games went on by day and by night, with cards made from the heads of drums that had been worn out in service.

Some of the captains had great chains of gold made for them by the king's artificers, and Cortés also indulged himself in this vanity, besides ordering a magnificent service of plate, some of which he afterwards left in Honduras. Little good was derived by the soldiers from their ill-gotten wealth, and the golden chains proved lures to destruction, not long after, for other adventurers from Cuba.

## XIII

### AN INVASION BY NARVAEZ

1520

IF Cortés had been content with temporal dominion merely, all might have been well, at least for a while; but he was not satisfied while the worship of the Aztec gods went on openly in the *teocallis* and that of his own deity was conducted in secret. With a troop of soldiers one day he invaded the *teocallis* and threatened to sweep the idols from their thrones, but was temporarily pacified by the assignment of a sanctuary on the pyramid-top as a chapel for the Virgin. This place was cleansed, an altar and crucifix erected and left in charge of a disabled soldier, who kept his lonely vigils amid the priests and Aztec idols, who were anything but congenial company.

In consequence of this invasion of the temple by Cortés (Montezuma soon assured him), the Aztec priests had received a mes-

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sage from their gods threatening to leave them entirely at the mercy of the invaders unless the latter were immediately put to death. "I find," said the emperor, "that I am threatened [by the priests] with the direst punishments of Heaven if I allow you to remain any longer in my kingdom; and such discontent already prevails among my nobles that, unless I quickly remove the cause, it will be altogether impossible to pacify them. Wherefore it has become necessary for my own safety, as well as for yours, and the good of all the kingdom, that you prepare at once to return to your native land!"

This decision was communicated to Cortés more than six months after Montezuma had been made captive, or some time in May, 1520, so the Spaniard could not complain of undue haste in the matter, yet he professed to be very much astonished.

"I am surprised at what you say," he exclaimed; "yet I have heard, and thank you much. Name a time when you wish us to depart, and so it shall be."

"Take the time that seems to you necessary," rejoined the sovereign; "but do not delay without cause. Meanwhile, I will

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order that when you do go two loads of gold shall be given you, and a load for each of your companions."

"I thank your majesty," said Cortés, in reply (having by this time invented an excuse for delay), "but you are already well aware how I destroyed my ships, when I first landed in your territory. So now we have need of others in order to return, and I beg that you will restrain your priests and warriors until I can build them. I should feel obliged, also, if you would loan me workmen to fell the trees and shape the timbers. I myself have ship-builders, and when the vessels are built we will take our departure."

Montezuma willingly assented to this plan, and promptly ordered Aztec axemen sent to the coast at Vera Cruz, where, under the direction of a skilled shipwright, Martin Lopez (who had built the brigantines then on the lake), the work went on in good earnest. The ships were begun—of that there is little doubt; but Cortés had no intention to depart, and cast about for some other excuse for remaining. His artful mind was resourceful in emergencies, and so he said: "Your majesty, there is one other thing of which, I presume, you are well aware. It is

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this: when we go I shall be under the necessity of taking your majesty with us, in order to present you to my sovereign lord, the emperor of Spain." This proposition was by no means agreeable to Montezuma, and he became very pensive and sad; but he did not long continue in this state, for he one day sent for Cortés, and informed him that there was now no necessity either for remaining longer or for building the ships. Then he spread before him a picture-chart that he had received by courier from the coast, upon which was plainly depicted a fleet of eighteen vessels recently arrived at Vera Cruz. "Now, Malintzin," exclaimed the delighted Montezuma, "you can go at once, for here are ships enough to carry all."

"Yes, and bless the great Redeemer for his mercies," answered Cortés, joyfully. But he knew that those eighteen ships had not come from Cuba without a purpose, and debated within himself what that purpose was. At first it was thought they contained reinforcements, and taking this view the Spaniards filled the city with the sounds of their rejoicings, discharging cannon, shouting, and firing off their arquebuses.

These eleven ships and seven brigantines,

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containing 1400 soldiers and a vast quantity of munitions, had been sent by Governor Velasquez, of Cuba, and, consequently, were not intended for the assistance of Cortés, but *for his subjection*. The expedition was commanded by one Pánfilo de Narvaez, a companion of Velasquez, and he had instructions to overcome Cortés and take him to Cuba, dead or alive; though it made little difference which, for he was to be executed, on arrival there, as a rebel, a traitor to his king and to Velasquez.

Montezuma was informed as to the true purport of this expedition, as was made apparent by his changed demeanor, and the insolence of the priests and nobles increased to such an extent that the Spaniards became greatly alarmed, "expecting every moment to be attacked." Their fears were justified, according to Doña Marina, who was familiar with the attendants at court, and by the terror and tears of little Ortego, a Spanish lad to whom Montezuma had become attached, and who served him as page and interpreter. Though intrenched within the massive walls of the great palace, with cannon commanding the gates and sentinels pacing the battlements, the Spanish soldiers

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never slept except in their armor; their steeds were always saddled, with bridles on the pommels, and every man was prepared for the worst.

Cortés called a council of his officers, and, as his wont was when in trouble, he distributed gifts among the men as well as promises. He flattered his brave veterans by telling them that they were equal to ten times their number of opponents, whatever they were, and wherever they met them; so he set forth, with but 200 soldiers, all told, to meet and conquer Narvaez with quite six times as many.

It is not quite fair to Narvaez to state that Cortés went to oppose him with a far inferior force (and, as the short sequel will show, defeated him), for he had already sent the Rev. Father Olmedo, armed with a most potent weapon for creating defection in the invader's ranks. That weapon was *gold* (of which the real owners, the veterans, had been so unjustly deprived), and the reverend father used it to such good effect, together with the persuasive influence of his oily tongue, that he really won the battle for Cortés before it was fought. The commander himself had done something with the gold-



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en weapon, also, as will appear. It seems that Captain Sandoval (at Villa Rica), when summoned to surrender by some emissaries of Narvaez, not only refused, but bagged the messengers up in nets, and, placing them on the backs of Indian carriers, sent them to the city of Mexico. Theirs was a most wonderful journey: carried all the way, more than 200 miles, on the backs of Indians, passed from one to another, ever without rest, and they arrived at the capital nearly dead. Cortés professed great sorrow for the act of his captain, Sandoval, and having shown the messengers from Narvaez the treasure he had accumulated, and bestowed a goodly portion upon them, as a salve for their injuries, he sent them back to the coast, his friends and ardent partisans.

When, therefore—after leaving the garrison in charge of Alvarado—Cortés started for the coast with 200 men, he had, in effect, secured 1000 more by means of his gold. Still it was a most venturesome undertaking, which none but the bravest of men would have attempted. The distance which intervened between the capital and the coast was covered quickly by forced marches, and in due time Cortés and his in-

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vincible veterans arrived at Totonac territory, where they camped, almost within sight of Cempoalla.

Cortés and Father Olmedo had accomplished wonders with their gold, and if the stern Narvaez had not been incorruptible there is no knowing but that he himself might have been won over and the shameful strife between the Spaniards averted. But Narvaez was bent upon securing Cortés, whom, he swore by his beard, he would march against "with fire, sword, and a free rope." He then posted his artillery, cavalry, and infantry in a plain a few miles distant from Cempoalla, but a terrible storm coming up towards night, he and his inexperienced soldiers sought shelter in the Totonac city, where he occupied one of the temples. When the fat cacique of Cempoalla saw how carelessly the guards were posted, he said to Narvaez: "Huh! What are you doing? Do you think Malintzin and his *teules* are careless, like you? I tell you that when you least expect it, he will come upon you and put you all to death! . . ."

Narvaez laughed lightly, but he heeded the warning, and placed eighteen guns in line before the building selected as his quar-

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ters, posted a grand guard of forty cavalry in the forest, twenty of whom were to patrol during the night, and then retired to shelter. He promised a reward of 2000 crowns for Cortés or Sandoval; but this was an occasion, most certainly, of "first catch your hare."

In a speech before the battle, Cortés said to his men: "I must remind you how often you all have been at the point of death, in various wars and battles, how we have suffered from fatigue and hunger, sleeping on the ground, on our arms; not to mention above forty of our number dead, and your own wounds as yet unhealed; our sufferings by sea and land; the perils of Tabasco, Tlascalala, and Cholula, where the vessels were prepared in which we were to have been boiled; and our perilous entry into Mexico. And now, gentlemen, Narvaez comes and maligns and asperses us with the great Montezuma, and immediately on landing proclaims war against us with fire, sword, and free rope, as if we were infidel Moors!"

The attack was made at midnight, a fitting hour for such a battle as ensued, between men of the same nationality, who should have been united against the common enemy.

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The storm was at its height, and the soldiers of Narvaez, snug in their quarters, were taken by surprise. Suddenly they heard, borne by the shrieking gale, high above the roar of the tropical tempest, the battle-cry, "Santiago!" and the countersign of Cortés: "Espiritu Santo! Espiritu Santo!" Despite the fearful odds against them, the veterans swept with the storm upon the legions of Narvaez, charged up to the cannons' mouths without a pause, and drove the cavalry back upon the temples, from which the infantry now swarmed down into the plazas like hornets from their nests. . . . Brave Sandoval took the guns before half of them had been discharged; Pizarro, with a handful of lancers, supported him so effectually that they were soon turned upon their former owners; and Cortés himself, fighting with the fury of a demon, animated his band with the energy of despair. He and his men could expect nothing but death in case they were defeated, while the soldiers of Narvaez were themselves hopeful of greater rewards under Cortés than with their leader, and fought half-heartedly. The temples had been forced and a sanguinary conflict was going on around their terraced slopes (down which,

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not many months before, Cortés had tumbled the Cempoallan idols), when the voice of Narvaez shrieked out: "Santa Maria, help! They have struck out one of my eyes!"

Then a great shout went up. "Victory! Victory for the Espiritu Santo! Narvaez is dead! Live our King and Cortés! Narvaez is dead! . . ."

As the cry increased in volume and spread through Cempoalla, the soldiers of Narvaez cast down their arms and submitted, in groups and by hundreds. The victory of the few over the many had been won, and hardly had daylight appeared ere the former foes of Cortés were hastening to enlist beneath his banner.

Seated within a temple on the plaza, an orange-colored mantle draping his shoulders, his sword by his side, and surrounded by his valiant officers, Cortés "received the salutations of the cavaliers, who, as they dismounted, came to kiss his hand. And it was wonderful to see the affability and the kindness with which he spoke to and embraced them, and the compliments which he made to them; for among the number were many influential friends of Velasquez, now completely won over to the cause of his dead-

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ly enemy." During all this time, and even before the arrival of the cavalry, the drums, fifes, and timbrels of the army of Narvaez never ceased, having struck up at daybreak in honor of Cortés, without a command from any one.

One of them, a negro and a comical fellow, danced and shouted for joy, crying out, "Where are the Romans who with such small numbers ever achieved such a glorious victory?" Another of those who were equally ready to shout for Cortés as for Narvaez, though they had come into Mexico with the latter, was our old friend Cervantes, the jester, the same who had cautioned Velasquez against the ambitions of the very man who had won this wonderful victory.

The unlucky Narvaez, whose right eye had been torn out by a spear-thrust, and who was in great agony, said to Cortés, as he came in to view his prisoner, "Señor Captain, appreciate as it merits your good-fortune in having defeated me." Cortés answered that his thanks were due to God and to his valiant soldiers; but this was the least of his and their achievements since their arrival in New Spain (or Mexico). This may sound like boasting, and the taunting of an unfort-

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unate opponent, and so it was. The Narvaez people were greatly ashamed of the part they had played in the affair, and some of them sought to excuse their cowardice by putting forth a singular statement. In the midnight darkness, they said, with only now and then the fitful light of the moon shining through the storm clouds, they had mistaken the myriads of fire-flies, sporting in the forest and above the meadows, for so many soldiers with lighted matchlocks in their hands.

## XIV

### THE SPANIARDS MEET WITH DISASTER

1520

CORTÉS was now universally recognized as the greatest man in Mexico — in America. By the victory which he had wrested from threatened defeat, he found himself in command of a total force of nearly 1500 men, including ninety cavalry and 1000 infantry. He detached from his force those most likely to cause trouble, and sent them off to colonize along the coast, while with his usual promptness he prepared to explore the unknown regions to the northward and southward.

He had distributed bribes and gifts to the new-comers with a free hand, leaving his veterans with almost nothing. Indeed, he even compelled them to return the horses, arms, and armor of which they had despoiled the enemy, replying to their indignant protests that, inasmuch as the men of Narvaez



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were still more numerous than themselves, it was policy to placate them with these gifts, especially as they would soon be fighting with them against the Mexicans. Little thought Cortés, however, of what was in store for him and them respecting the reception that enemy had prepared for their return. Scarcely had he begun to reduce order from the chaotic conditions which succeeded to the fight at Cempoalla, than messengers arrived, both from Montezuma and Alvarado, with a story of disaster for which he was quite unprepared. A terrible massacre had been committed, 600 Mexican nobles having been slain, and as a consequence the capital was ablaze with the fires of a popular insurrection. Alvarado, who had been a favorite with Montezuma, second only to Cortés himself, and to whom the emperor had given the Mexican name of *Tonatiuh*, or the Sun-faced Man, on account of his ruddy complexion, red hair, and sunny disposition, was also a trusted friend of Cortés, sharing his energy of character, but without his discretion and judgment. While Cortés was battling for his life in Vera Cruz, Alvarado was approached by some of the nobles and priests with the request that

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they be permitted to celebrate the feast of their war-god by their customary ceremonies in the great court of the palace in which the Spaniards were quartered. It fell due in the month of May, and as their king had always taken part in this festival, by dancing with the nobles, they also requested that he be allowed to do so now.

Alvarado refused permission for Montezuma to join them in the festival, but he allowed them to assemble for the purpose in the great court-yard, which was usually occupied by the Tlascalan allies. There they gathered, in their richest garbs and wearing their most valuable ornaments. They were unarmed, and probably had no evil intentions towards the Spaniards; but while in the midst of their ceremonials, and utterly defenceless, they were attacked by Alvarado's soldiers. The terrible massacre at Cholula was here repeated; only in this instance there was not the shadow of an excuse for the act, except for the whispered suspicions of the Tlascalans, who reported that the nobles had secreted their weapons outside the walls of the palace and planned to raise an insurrection of the people.

The excuse that Alvarado gave, when

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sternly brought to account by Cortés, was that he had suspicion of their hostile intentions, and so put them to the sword, having in mind that "the first attack is half the battle." In this instance it was the whole of it, for not a soul was left of that band of nobles, the "flower of Mexican aristocracy."

Whatever may have been Alvarado's motive for this massacre, he and his fellow-murderers did not fail to strip the bodies of the slain, reaping a rich though blood-stained harvest of jewels. Avarice probably prompted him to his horrible deed, which, as Cortés sternly told him, was that of a madman. After all was over, after the dead nobles had been pillaged and thrust without the walls, the city for a space was ominously silent. Then the infuriated populace dashed against the palace walls, like the waves of ocean in a storm. Though beaten back again and again by the deadly fire of musketry and artillery, they breached the defences, and might have captured the palace by brute force had not Montezuma appeared on the battlements. He addressed the enraged people, praying them to desist, and they so far respected his wishes as to retire, but only changed their tactics, without abating their fury in the

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least, by throwing up barricades, and so closely investing the palace that not one of its inmates could escape.

This was the condition of affairs in Mexico when Cortés arrived at the causeway leading to the capital, over which he had marched in triumph seven months before. It was June 24, 1520, that he made his second entry; but this time what a contrast was afforded to his first reception! For the great causeway, throughout its entire length, was entirely deserted, and only a few Indians were visible, standing silently in the doorways of their houses, and scowling fiercely at the conqueror, whom they had previously received with rejoicings. Strangely enough, though the Aztecs were aware of his coming, they had not offered to impede his progress by raising the bridges or obstructing the causeway, and the troop marched swiftly to the central square, where, the besiegers yielding sullenly before them, they found the gates of the palace closed and not a Spaniard visible. At last, Alvarado appeared, and, learning from the lips of Cortés that he was still in supreme command, ordered the gates thrown open to his countrymen and their allies.

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Scant time was afforded them for greetings or congratulations, since the Mexicans had retired only temporarily, in order to admit the reinforcements into the trap they had set for their destruction. They could easily have prevented them from entering the city; but they chose, rather, to get the hated invaders together and then overwhelm them in a resistless attack. The city contained at least 300,000 people, perhaps one-fifth that number being warriors who were ready to sacrifice their lives in an attempt to destroy the Spaniards utterly. Against this vast though untrained and irregular force, Cortés could oppose less than 1800 armed soldiers and 8000 native allies, chiefly Tlascalcan warriors.

Against mere numbers, Cortés felt himself invincible; but the Mexicans had summoned an ally that could reduce the stoutest force and largest army to terms. This ally was famine. All the besiegers had to do was to cut off the supply of food and water, and time would perform the rest. When Cortés learned that the great market was closed, and that supplies no longer came in, he sent a threatening message to Montezuma, who replied that he could do nothing,

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being a prisoner, but suggested the release of his brother, Cuitlahuatzin, lord of Iztapalapan, who could then use his authority. Immediately on entering the city, Cortés had been informed that Montezuma sent his congratulations and was awaiting him in the court. But the conqueror, having a suspicion that the deposed monarch had been treating with Narvaez, angrily exclaimed: "Away with him, the dog! What have I to do with him?" The remark being repeated to Montezuma, he was deeply grieved; but his revenge came swiftly, for, upon the release of Cuitlahuatzin, the people thereby secured what they had hitherto lacked—a leader. Instead of opening the market and sending supplies to the Spaniards, the wily Aztec organized and armed his warriors so rapidly that the next morning they stormed the Spanish quarters by thousands.

Convinced that in releasing the powerful Aztec prince he had committed an error fatal to his safety, Cortés did what he could to repair it by ordering a foray by 400 men, who were drawn into an ambushade and compelled to retreat, with a loss of twenty-three killed and many wounded.

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The thronging warriors pursued the Spaniards to the gates, and sent into the courts of the palace such a tempest of darts and arrows, great stones and javelins, that cart-loads of these rude but effective weapons were afterwards collected. Flaming arrows set the palace roof on fire. A breach was opened in the wall, and through it the Mexicans poured like a flood, which was only stayed by the incessant play of cannon and musketry.

All through the night the wearied Spaniards worked at repairing the openings made by the Aztecs in their fortification, and at daylight of the second morning were called upon to repel yet other hordes of warriors, who came on regardless of the gaps made in their ranks by the fire-arms. In such dense masses they pressed forward that the gunners had no occasion to take aim, for they could not miss, fire where they would.

While the swarming warriors battled in the streets and squares, other thousands covered the *azoteas*, or flat roof-tops, of structures surrounding the palace, and poured into its courts a plunging rain of missiles, killing some and wounding a great number,

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both of the Spaniards and Tlascalans. The genius of Cortés set itself to combat this new evil, and he caused to be constructed three large military machines, called *mantas*, like movable fortresses or castles, each one mounted on wheels and defended by twenty soldiers. These *mantas* were pierced with port-holes for cannon and loop-holes for arquebuses and cross-bows; but, when pushed out of the gateway and against the walls, they soon failed of their purpose, as the Aztecs tumbled down huge stones from the roof-tops, which crushed not only the frail timbers of which they were made, but the valiant soldiers beneath them.

While every man of the garrison acted the part of a hero, compelled thereto by the desperate nature of the situation, the animating spirit of the company was stout Cortés himself, who was at the front in every adventure, exposing himself with a reckless disregard of life excelled only by the Aztecs themselves. On the third day, after the failure of the attack with the *mantas* (which were finally abandoned in the plaza), Cortés led another charge with his cavalry down the great street of Tlacopan. The instant his cavalcade emerged from the palace gate-



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way it was set upon by the swarming warriors, who surrounded it on every side. The horses were unable to keep their footing on the slippery pavement of the plaza, and several of them were soon cut down, and their riders either killed or borne away captive to the great temple for sacrifice. Cortés was compelled to sound the retreat; but just as he turned back he caught a glimpse of his friend, Duero, desperately fighting against great odds, and at once dashed to his rescue, shouting his battle-cry of "Santiago!" He scattered the crowd of Aztecs by the fury of his charge, and assisting Duero to mount his horse (from which he had been dragged by his assailants), he led the way back to the troop, and finally regained the palace court safe and sound, though greatly exhausted.

The Mexicans fighting under Cuitlahuatzin had done what no other opponents of the Spaniards in America had accomplished before: they had compelled them to retreat. The prestige attaching to their name and deeds was destroyed, and the Aztecs no longer feared them as immortals whom their weapons could not kill. They had resolved to crush the Spaniards by mere weight

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of numbers hurled upon them in impenetrable masses. Many individuals of those masses would fall, never to rise again; but the work of destruction would go on until not an invader remained.

They fought for the glory of their war-god, who, they cried out to the Spaniards, in the thick of battle and in the night-watches (when they ceased from fighting), was tired of waiting for his victims. "But the gods have delivered you, at last, into our hands!" they shouted. "The stone of sacrifice is ready. The knives of *iztli* are sharpened. The wild beasts of the temple are waiting to devour you! The great serpent-drum will soon proclaim your fate to others yet to be devoured!"

The great temple, the *teocalli*, was the actual centre of attack on the part of the Spaniards and of defence by the Mexicans. It towered above the palace of Axayacatl, but on the opposite side of the plaza, to a height, including the towers in which the gods were housed, of nearly 150 feet. Five or six hundred Mexican warriors had taken their stand upon the summit-platform of the *teocalli*, where they had fortified themselves, and from which point of vantage

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they poured down a perfect deluge of great stones, darts, arrows — missiles of every sort.

As they commanded the entire area of the palace, its open courts, battlements, and all approaches, the Spanish position was becoming untenable, and Cortés ordered 100 of his best soldiers to storm the temple and dislodge the warriors. They made three different attempts to do so, but were driven back in confusion, and he resolved to lead the assault in person; for, if the Aztecs were not driven off, the Spaniards must retreat or be destroyed. He was already suffering from a severe wound in his left hand, but he lashed his shield to arm and wrist, and, flourishing his sword, called for volunteers to follow him to what appeared to be certain death for all.

The gates were thrown open and the cavaliers charged into the square; but the pavements were now so slippery with blood that the horses fell repeatedly, and so were sent back, while the dismounted riders pursued their way on foot. There were 300 of them, led by Cortés, closely followed by his bravest cavaliers, such as Alvarado, Sandoval, and Ordaz. They were supported

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by a troop of infantry, and by 3000 Tlascalans, who held the gathering crowds of Aztecs in check while the swordsmen and arquebusiers sprang up the terraced slopes. Five times they were compelled to pass around the pyramid, fighting from one terrace to another, before they gained the elevated platform in mid-air, where were gathered the Mexican priests and nobles.

“From the steps of the great temple they opposed us in front” (says a participant in this, the bloodiest battle of the war), “and we were attacked by such numbers on both sides that, although our guns swept off ten or fifteen at each discharge, and in each attack of our infantry we killed as many with our swords, we could not make any effectual impression or ascend the steps. Here Cortés showed himself the man that he really was. What a desperate engagement we then had! Every man of us was covered with blood, and above forty were left dead upon the spot.”

Furious at this attack upon their sanctuary, the Mexicans rallied about their imperilled nobles in vast numbers. Four or five thousand rushed into the surrounding enclosure and up the steps of the pyramid, defending it with lances, slings, and javelins.

## THE SPANIARDS MEET WITH DISASTER

But it was of no avail. The mail-clad warriors, in their armor of impenetrable steel, bore everything before them, and, though three hours elapsed before this dreadful conflict ended, they finally succeeded in setting fire to the temples of the gods. Two or three priests alone survived of the Mexicans, more than 500 having been slain in that battle in the air, while fifty Spaniards were killed, and nearly all of the gallant band covered with wounds.

Cortés himself had a narrow escape from death when two stalwart savages endeavored to drag him over the edge of the precipitous platform; but he shook them off by a mighty effort, and they lost their lives, without recompense, for their heroic action. Many a man, Aztec as well as Spaniard, had preceded them down the steep slopes of the pyramid, meeting death among the fighting hordes below; and many thousands more had gone that way, victims of barbarian sacrifice, during the years of Aztec domination. Down these same steps, or terraces, the Aztec priests were wont to tumble the headless carcasses of the war-god's victims—whether of young men taken in battle or maidens in the bloom of youth—whose hearts

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had first been offered to the grim Huitzilo-pochtli.

No more of these sacrifices were to be made before him now, as he was soon dislodged from his high place in the temple-tower and sent headlong to the base of the pyramid, while the oratory in which he was enshrined, its walls bespattered with human gore, went up in flames, that proclaimed to all around the Spaniards' victory. Cortés thought that by showing the Aztecs the impotency of their gods he might win them over to his side, or at least lead them to abjure their idols: but the effect of their war-god's downfall was only to increase their rage and hate. They stubbornly disputed his passage back to the palace, though many of their chiefs were slain in the fight on the pyramid; and they replied to his arguments, later, that though he had destroyed their temples, disfigured their gods, and massacred their countrymen, they were content, so long as they were sure of their revenge. "Our only sorrow is," they said, "that there will be too few of you left to satisfy the vengeance of our gods. . . . You must soon fall into our hands, for your provisions are failing; and, moreover, the *bridges are broken down, and*

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*you cannot escape!"* This was the answer returned to Cortés when, having called a conference of the few remaining nobles, he tried to arrange terms for peace. The indomitable Aztecs would not listen to talk of peace; their united voice was for war, bitter war, to the end.

They had not only hunger and consuming thirst to fight, but still the dauntless enemy, for when they had gained their quarters they found them almost in possession of the Aztecs, who had again broken down the walls and were swarming into the palace, like wolves into a sheepfold. These were driven out, but the next morning the conflict was renewed with redoubled ferocity, and they succeeded in penetrating as far as the great court, where the Spaniards fought them hand to hand. Finally expelled from the palace, leaving behind them hundreds of dead and wounded, the enemy repeatedly stormed the walls, set fire to the roof of the building, and showered upon its inmates countless missiles—arrows, stones, and darts.

Cortés had scorned and insulted the Aztec sovereign; he had made him appear an enemy of his own people, had deprived him of liberty and all his treasures; yet so des-



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perate was the situation that he sent for Montezuma, and humbly desired him to show himself upon the battlements and beg his countrymen to desist from their attacks. The dejected king replied to the message: "What have I to do with Malintzin? I desire neither to hear him, nor to live any longer, since it is on his account I am reduced to this unhappy fate!"

At length he yielded, and went out upon the *azotea*, attended by some soldiers, who held their shields ready to protect him as he addressed the people. The chiefs and nobles, as soon as their former lord and master appeared, commanded their troops to refrain from fighting, and, the tumult having abated, the multitude awaited what he had to tell them. Many were on their knees, doing homage to the once-mighty one, as he, in faltering accents, requested them to disperse to their homes, and pledged his word that the Spaniards would retire from the city.

Four of the principal nobility, who had advanced in front of the others, then interrupted him, saying that they had raised his brother to the throne made vacant by his action in choosing to associate with the invaders, whom they had solemnly promised



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their gods never to cease fighting until they were utterly destroyed. But they added that they daily prayed for his safety and deliverance, and should never cease to venerate him as their priest and king.

It was evident to the populace, however, that he was no longer held in veneration, and they showed their change of attitude by a shower of stones and arrows, which flew like hail about the person of his majesty. The attendant soldiers, who had relaxed their vigilance, hastened to interpose their shields; but it was too late. He was thrice wounded, and by a stone which struck him on the temple rendered unconscious, in which condition he was borne to his quarters, where he lingered a few days, then expired.

"Cortés and our captains wept for him," wrote one of the Spaniards who knew him, "and he was lamented by them and all the soldiers who had known him as if he had been their father; nor is it to be wondered at, considering how good he was." Still, he was as surely murdered by the Spaniards as if they had driven a dagger into his breast. They were impressed, not so much by his goodness as by his generosity.

## XV

### THE MIDNIGHT RETREAT FROM MEXICO

1520

**M**ONTEZUMA died on June 29th or 30th. His body was given in charge of the Mexican nobles, who burned it to ashes and interred the sacred dust at Chapultepec. Their lamentations could be heard by the Spaniards; but neither party spent much time in openly mourning the great departed, and the terrible contest went on almost without cessation.

It became apparent to Cortés that his position was no longer tenable, and he resolved upon retreat. To remain was certain death; to retreat was fraught with danger; but there was a chance for some to escape with their lives. In pursuance of this intention, he ordered frequent sallies from the palace into the great square, and along the causeway leading to Tacuba. Many houses bordering the causeway were

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burned and the gaps caused by the removal of the bridges were filled with their débris. These gaps, however, were immediately reopened as soon as the Spaniards had retired, and Cortés found himself foiled at every point. It was evident that not only were the Aztecs superior in numbers, but also in strategy, for they had, by a subterfuge, obtained possession of their high-priest, or *teoteuctli* (who had been taken prisoner in the fight at the temple), and with his aid had crowned Cuitlahuatzin king. He was the next in succession; but Cortés had aimed at placing either a son or nephew of Montezuma upon the throne, and was greatly chagrined at his double defeat.

The Mexicans gave the Spaniards two days more to live, threatening at the end of that time to carry their fortress by assault, at whatever cost of life to them. Their numbers were increased by accessions from outside the capital, and their repeated attacks were as vigorous as at first; while the Spaniards were already weak from hunger and half dead from exhaustion, being compelled to constant vigilance, without time for rest or sleep. Within two days of Montezuma's demise, preparations were hurried forward

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for departure. The causeway leading to Tacuba was selected as the route of retreat, being the shortest road to the main-land. As all the bridges across its canals had been destroyed, Cortés ordered a pontoon of wood to be constructed, which was placed in charge of fifty picked soldiers, all bound by oath to die rather than desert it, and 400 Tlascalans. There were three canals, and (as the sequel showed) three pontoons should have been provided. But for this oversight, hundreds of lives might have been saved, which were lost on the night of the retreat. Another mistake, and the greatest of all, was the choosing of night-time for retiring from the city. This was contrary to the dictates of military strategy, and was owing to superstition, which, as we know, was rife among that band of fanatical Spaniards.

It was just before midnight, July 1st, that the palace gates were thrown open and the little army emerged to begin the perilous passage of the causeway. The vanguard was in command of Sandoval, whose courage had often been tried; the rear-guard was under Alvarado and Velasquez de Leon, both valiant soldiers; while the centre was in charge

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of Cortés, who had a general supervision of the whole. They crossed the plaza in safety, but not in silence, owing to the rumble of the artillery and the clang of iron hoofs on the pavement. Still, no Aztecs showed themselves, and they were beginning to hope for a safe departure by the time the first canal was reached. Here the pontoon was fixed in position, and was safely crossed by the vanguard, the artillery, the first division of Tlascalans, the officials in charge of the king's gold, the prisoners, and most of the baggage.

Before departure, Cortés had divided Montezuma's treasure, intrusting the "king's fifth" to the proper officers, and had then given permission to his soldiers to carry off the remainder, at the same time warning them of the danger they incurred in assuming too large a burden. The avarice of many tempted them to lade themselves with the treasure, and few of these escaped the perils of that night of disaster.

It was while the bridge was being placed across the first canal that the Aztecs made their enemies aware that their movements were observed. The alarm was given by sentinels stationed at the canal, and taken up

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by the priests watching on the *teocalli*, who proclaimed it to all the people by blowing horns and sounding the great drum of serpent-skin above the war-god's altar. "*Tlaltelulco! tlaltelulco!*" they shouted. "Out with the canoes; for the *teules* are going; they are going; attack them at the canals!" Instantly, as though they had been evoked by enchanters' wands, arose most fearful apparitions on every side: from the lake, from canoes, from the canal, hurrying from the city streets; and a hail-storm of stones, arrows, darts, and burning-brands fell upon the heads of that devoted band huddled on the narrow causeway.

The vanguard dashed forward, only to be halted by the second canal; the rear-guard made the best resistance possible, but it was overwhelmed by the multitude of its enemies; and between these two divisions were crowded cavalry, infantry, Tlascalans, prisoners, artillery — a confused, disorganized mass — the animate portion of which was completely at the mercy of the infuriated Aztecs, who slaughtered at will, and sated to the full their craving for blood and revenge.

The pontoon was so wedged in position that it could not be moved, so the second

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canal was crossed without it. How, none but the great All-seeing One can tell. The Spaniards knew not how they got across—such few as escaped—but it was mainly upon the corpses of slain men and horses, mingled with maimed and dying comrades, artillery, treasure-boxes, and the like. At the third canal it was the same, except that the horrible bridge was composed of human corpses, mostly, and the writhing bodies of the wounded.

And on every side the gloating, fiercely exultant Aztecs were hewing at the defenceless throng with their great obsidian broadswords, piercing the shrinking prisoners and the raging soldiers alike with lances, showering upon them darts, arrows, stones—every sort of missile-weapon they could lay their hands to, in the darkness of that terrible night.

They who were killed outright met the most merciful fate, for it was reserved for those who were made prisoners, whether wounded or not, to be sacrificed before the terrible war-god. After the first alarm was given, the great serpent-drum was silent for a space; then its horrifying boom resounded again above all other sounds, at intervals,

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giving notice that upon the Sacrificial Stone was stretched a prisoner, whose palpitating heart was that instant being torn from his breast. This assurance spurred on the Aztecs to fierce energy, and the causeway was enclosed between double and triple ranks of canoes, into which were dragged such victims as could be reached, who were instantly hurried off to the temple of sacrifice.

Imagine all these dreadful scenes transpiring on a night of pitchy darkness, made more miserable (if that were possible) by a drizzling rain, from the mists of which above the surrounding lake emerged those demoniac figures, which slashed and slew, and disappeared again with shrieking prisoners in their grasp. What wonder that the terrors of that night of black despair have survived through centuries of change in Mexico, and that ever since they have served to recall the vengeance of the Aztecs. The retreat of the "sorrowful night" — *la noche triste* — has long since passed into history; but traditions of its terrors still remain with the people of Mexico.

In the little village of Popotla, near to Tacuba, still stands a venerable cypress-tree, a giant of a gigantic family, beneath which,



TREE OF THE NOCHE TRISTE, AT POPOTLA





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it is said, Cortés sat awhile, in the gray dawn of the morning succeeding to that awful night, and wept over the loss of his army.

“In Tacuba was Cortés,  
With many a gallant chief;  
He thought upon his losses,  
And bowed his head in grief.”

Most of the vanguard escaped, some of the centre, and among them their commander, and finally a few of the rear-guard; but fully one-third the Spanish force had been destroyed, or more than 500; 4000 Tlascalans, and all the prisoners, included among the latter being three children of Montezuma, Cacamatzin, and several caciques of note. Among those who escaped were the interpreters, Aguilar and Malinche, who were saved as if by a miracle, and Alvarado, who came limping along with the aid of his lance, having lost his horse, and also his comrade of the rear-guard, the gallant Velasquez de Leon.

The survivors of the *noche triste* escaped only with their lives, almost everything else having been lost; all the artillery and ammunition, all the baggage, including vast treasure of gold in bars and priceless orna-

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ments; all but twenty-three of the horses, and even all the muskets, or arquebuses, which the despairing soldiers had thrown away in their frenzied flight.

Theirs was a "dreadful deliverance," indeed; nor were they safe even when they had reached the main-land, for a long and weary journey lay before them to Tlascala, a land of doubtful refuge and security. The courage of Cortés had not failed him in any emergency, even though his judgment had been at fault, and the fact that he was among the first to arrive at Tacuba was owing to no voluntary act of his own. He was pressed forward by the throng, when, in the confusion of that midnight march, it became a matter of "every man for himself."

Rarely has history recorded an instance of such signal vengeance or a more disastrous retreat. If the Mexicans had followed up their advantage, or had stationed a force of warriors to intercept the Spaniards at Tacuba, not a single one could have escaped. That any did so was owing to their negligence; but they seemed satisfied with this venture in nocturnal warfare. Their desire for blood was for the moment glutted, and they desisted from following the retreating

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Spaniards, in order to sacrifice their prisoners, perhaps to plunder the wreckage, and bury their dead.

The causeway to Tacuba was not the most direct route for the retreating Spaniards to follow, having Tlascala as the objective of their journey; but it was the shortest. In order to reach Tlascala (which by common consent was now their goal), they were compelled to make a wide *détour* around the northern end of Lake Tezcoco, and the first night they fortified themselves in a temple on a hill nine miles distant from Mexico, where, many years later, a chapel was erected in remembrance of their woes. They halted here only long enough to sleep, to dress their many wounds, and make arrows for their cross-bows, the next day moving on, though slowly, under the guidance of a Tlascalan, who alone knew the way to their hoped-for haven of refuge. Their only food for several days consisted of the flesh of a horse, slain in the fight (and which they devoured even to its skin), a scant supply of green corn, and the roots of grasses, which the Indians dug out of the earth with their teeth.

In this manner, constantly assailed by

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hovering bands of Indians, the feeble remnant of that band of conquerors (who had defied Montezuma in his capital and made all Mexico ring with the fame of their achievements), struggled forward towards Tlascala, nearly 100 miles away. "God only knows," wrote Cortés, "the toil and fatigue with which this journey was accomplished; for of twenty-three horses that remained to us, there was not one that could move briskly, nor a horseman able to raise his arm, nor a foot-soldier unhurt!"

During a week of weary and painful marching, the war-worn heroes hobbled on, the wounded on crutches, the sick and dying borne on horseback, their ears ever assailed by the shouts of hostile savages, "Hurry along, robbers and murderers, hurry along; you will soon meet with the vengeance due to your crimes!" After passing through a gap in the mountain range which encloses the valley of Mexico, they beheld what the threats of the Indians had implied: a vast host, estimated at more than 100,000 warriors, gathered in battle array on the great plain of Otumba. It was within sight of the famous pyramids of the sun and moon, at Teotihuacan (ominously named

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the "City of the Dead"), that the Aztec army, so long in gathering, was massed for the final struggle; and when the Spaniards beheld the swarming legions, with waving plumes, and weapons glancing in the sun, they justly feared their end had come.

Amid those myriad foes they were, as a Spanish historian has truly said, "like an islet in the sea, attacked on every side by roaring breakers"; but, though despairing, they were undismayed. After a brief harangue, Cortés formed them in phalanx, the foot-soldiers in the centre, the horsemen on the flanks, and like a rock they withstood the shocks of these roaring seas; but soon crumbled away under the repeated attacks.

The odds were greatly against the Spaniards, for they had not only lost prestige by defeat, but they had lost all their cannon and arquebuses. It was a hand-to-hand fight, after the manner of most ancient times, and to the bitter death, in which the best men, and the most enduring, would certainly win. There seemed no doubt which way victory would go, for the Aztecs outnumbered their foes more than 100 to one. But the tide was turned by Cortés himself, who, in the thick of battle, chanced to espy

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the cacique in command, surrounded by his chiefs, beneath a standard blazoned with the royal arms and glittering with gold. Knowing the superstitious reverence with which the Aztecs regarded their leader and this banner, and realizing that only by a most desperate stroke could he avert total defeat, he shouted to Sandoval and others: "On, gentlemen, let us charge them. 'Santiago! Santiago!'" The compact body of horsemen pierced the multitude of Aztecs like a wedge, dispersed the chiefs or trampled them down. With his own lance Cortés pinned the cacique to the ground, while one of his captains snatched the imperial banner and held it aloft for all to see. Instantly there was the wildest confusion in the ranks of the Aztecs, who, uttering howls of rage and despair, gave up the contest and fled the field.

It is to the honor of Cortés that he did not vaunt himself over the part he played in this affair, but, rather, wrote of it very modestly to his sovereign, "And we went fighting in that toilsome manner a great part of the day, until it pleased God that there was slain a person of the enemy who must have been the general, for with his death the battle ceased."



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That victory was the greatest the Spaniards had won, the slain having been put at 20,000; but they did not dare follow it up, and were only too glad to resume their march to Tlascala, which they reached three days later, or about July 10th.

## XVI

### SIEGE OF THE AZTEC CAPITAL

1521

CORTÉS and his companions were received by the Tlascalans with a kindness far beyond their deserts or expectations, and in the little republic they found for months a hospitable home. In view of the fact that four-fifths of the killed, in Mexico, had been natives of Tlascala, filling every house with woe and lament, and considering that the Spaniards had returned defeated, without a single fire-arm of any sort, and in a measure defenceless, the continued loyalty of the Tlascalans was greatly to their credit. It was not adequately requited by Cortés, after the conquest had been achieved; but into the future these simple, open-hearted people could not glance. In spite of a Mexican embassy, which followed swiftly after their retreat, with proffers of an offensive and defensive league against the stran-

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gers, who "had violated every sacred honor and sacrificed the lives of their friends to their lust for gold," they remained steadfast in their allegiance to the Spanish sovereign.

The homes of all, both high and low, were opened to the Spaniards, who were provided with native nurses and surgeons, and, surrounded with every attention, brought back to health and strength. Cortés himself had been most desperately wounded, having lost two fingers of his left hand, and received a blow from a war-club which had splintered his skull; but, even while lying on a bed of pain, he was scheming for the reconquest of the kingdom he had so nearly lost. His first act of consequence was to send for reinforcements from Villa Rica, on the coast, with which, together with his veterans, he intended to form the nucleus of an army. Such was his indomitable courage, which would not brook defeat. "Fortune ever favors those who dare," was his favorite proverb; and he wrote his sovereign, not long after his recovery, "I cannot believe that the good and merciful God will thus suffer His cause to perish among the heathen!"

His enemies, as hitherto, were contributing, though unwittingly, to his success. One

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of them (at least, a rival), the governor of Jamaica, had sent three vessels to form a colony on the coast north of Vera Cruz; but they cast anchor in that harbor instead, and the crews gladly joined with the friends of Cortés. Also, a company that had been sent out by a merchant adventurer, in a ship laden with valuable military stores. To these four vessels were added two more, which had been despatched by an old acquaintance (and enemy) of Cortés, the governor of Cuba, Velasquez. Still in ignorance of the fate of his former expedition, he believed his emissary, Narvaez, by that time, of course, all-powerful and supreme in Mexico. As fate would have it, this small expedition was commanded by our old friend, Pedro Barba, who, it will be recalled, was alcalde in Havana when Cortés sailed from that port. Barba was decoyed ashore and captured, and, with his men, was sent to Cortés, who soon won him over. Some soldiers and large quantities of war material were acquired with Barba; also two horses, which, added to the ten taken from the ships of Jamaica, made an even dozen—worth “all the world” to Cortés, at that time. Finally, there returned from His-

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paniola (whither Cortés had sent them with a portion of the treasure that had been saved), two agents, who brought with them eighty horses, 200 soldiers, a great and needed supply of muskets, with ammunition, and two big battering cannon. By these various means Cortés gradually gathered about him an army much larger than the one with which he originally invaded Mexico, and a small battery of cannon, though he was not very well supplied with muskets and ammunition.

He had gained accessions to his force; but at the same time he was compelled to send away to Cuba quite a company of malcontents, mostly men from the command of Narvaez, whose dread of the Aztecs and a repetition of the "sorrowful night" quite overcame their desire for glory and gold. Cortés had done his best to divert them from their scheme, by sending out forays for the conquest of neighboring tribes; but without avail. Great spoil resulted from these forays, and by means of them the spirits of the soldiers were revived, for they were constantly victorious.

The first of these punitive expeditions was to a southern province, Tepeaca, where, with-

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out fire-arms of any kind, and with only their good swords, spears, and targets, Cortés and his soldiers defeated the Indians in a great battle. At the town of Chacula, in this province, the natives had put fifteen Spaniards to death, while Cortés was in the Aztec city, and as a punishment all the women and children were taken for slaves. To the shoulder of each shrinking captive, whether child of tender years or blooming maiden, the hot iron was cruelly applied; and ever after it bore, burned deeply into the flesh, the letter G (*guerra*), brand of war.

So hardened were the soldiers, that they felt little sympathy for the unfortunate and innocent victims of their vengeance; but they were loud in their complaints of the manner in which these unlucky slaves were apportioned. For it seems, despite the perils he and his comrades had shared in common, Cortés had changed in character not at all. He still assumed the king and Cortés to be entitled to all the spoils, and that the poor soldier fought for them only to be despoiled, like the enemy. This, of course, caused great discontent among the soldiers, who charged Cortés with having

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concealed all the valuable slaves; and those of Narvaez swore they had never heard of such a thing as *two kings* and two-fifths, in his majesty's dominions.

When brought to task, Cortés swore by his conscience ("his usual oath") that it never should happen again; but not long after, learning that some of the soldiers, who had, at the risk of their lives, saved some gold bars from Montezuma's treasure (which he had given them permission to do, it will be remembered), he ordered them to deliver up the gold on pain of death. These transactions afford us side-lights as to the character of Cortés, and need no comment; but it is a sad reflection that one so brave could also be so base.

"Some will ask," writes blunt old Bernal Diaz, "how Cortés was able to send agents to Spain, to Hispaniola, and Jamaica without money. To this I reply that on the night of our retreat from Mexico, though many of the soldiers were killed, yet a considerable quantity of gold was saved, as the first who passed the bridge were the eighty loaded Tlascalans; so that though much was lost in the ditches of Mexico, yet all was not left there, and the gold which was brought

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off by the Tlascalans was by them delivered to Cortés."

By whatever means, but certainly by almost superhuman activity and toil during the five months of his stay in Tlascala, Cortés completed preparations for the darling object of his ambitions, the siege and capture of the Aztec capital. While his soldiers were sweeping the country outside the valley brim clear of possible allies for the Aztecs, while his agents at the coast, in Jamaica and Hispaniola, were recruiting for his army of occupation, he had hundreds of Tlascalans employed, under that invaluable man, Martin Lopez, the shipwright, hewing timbers for thirteen brigantines, in the great pine forests of Tlascala.

After sending the Cubans home, bearing letters to Velasquez and to Doña Catalina; and after despatching to his sovereign another of those wonderful letters ("*Cartas de Cortés*," which have lived to illumine his deeds in Mexico), Cortés departed for his goal. One hundred Tlascalans had been sent by him to the coast for the iron-work and rigging of the dismantled ships (including his own, those taken from Narvaez, from the Jamaicans, and from Barba), with orders



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to meet the army at Tezcoco, whither, also, Lopez was to send the timbers for the vessels. Towards Tezcoco, in the last week of December, 1520, Cortés took his way, attended by his little army of 600 soldiers and 10,000 Tlascalan allies.

He had chosen Tezcoco, the city on the lake of that name, as his centre of operations at the beginning of the siege, because of its many advantages. It was but nine miles distant by water from the capital, was well situated for attack as well as retreat, contained many fortified temples and palaces; and finally, commanded a stretch of fertile plain planted with maize, and capable of sustaining a large army. The king of Tezcoco, Coanacotzin, sent an embassy to meet Cortés, at the same time presenting him with a splendid banner as a token of peace; but, as he had been instrumental in killing more than forty Spaniards, who were in his territory several months before, he dared not face the advancing army, but fled by night to the Aztec city across the lake. In his place upon the vacant throne Cortés seated his younger brother, Prince Ixtlilxochitl (pronounced Eesht - leel - hó - cheetl), who, next to the Tlascalans, was the Span-

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fards' most serviceable ally during the siege.

Carrying out his sagacious scheme of cutting off from Mexico all the tributary cities and towns, Cortés was no sooner well established at Tezcoco than he marched upon Iztapalapan with 200 soldiers and 3000 allies. In that beautiful city, which had been the residence of King Cuiclahua (and was celebrated until long after the conquest for its wonderful gardens), Cortés came very near losing his life and his army, at one and the same time, for the inhabitants cut the dikes which kept back the waters of the two lakes by which it was surrounded, and in a trice the place was submerged. The Spaniards were busy at the sack of the city, setting fire to the houses, beating off the Aztec warriors, who came flocking thither in their war-canoes, and but for the vigilance of a Tlascalan sentinel might all have been drowned. Some few lost their lives as it was, and most of the survivors lost all their rich plunder and got their powder wet, which put them in very bad humor indeed.

At Iztapalapan, as well as at Chalco and Xochimilco (the last-named situated between

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the two others, and famous for its *chinampas*, or floating gardens), bodies of Aztec troops came over in war-canoes and did their utmost to defeat the plans of the invaders. Several Spaniards were captured alive, and, after having been barbarously sacrificed on the *teocalli*, their arms and legs were sent to different parts of Anahuac as trophies of Aztec valor. In the various temples of these tributary cities the sorrowing soldiers frequently discovered grewsome reminders of their slain countrymen, in the skins of their face with beards attached, tanned like leather, and hung around the altars, while the walls were besmeared with their blood.

Extending his forays in ever-widening circles, Cortés finally reached the wonderful city of Cuernavaca, which was situated between two deep ravines, spanned by bridges, which the Indians raised or destroyed at the appearance of the enemy. The army was compelled to passively endure the taunts of the Indians, safely intrenched in their impregnable position, until one of the soldiers (the redoubtable Bernal Diaz himself) discovered that two great trees, growing on opposite banks of the ravine, interlocked their limbs in mid-air, thus affording a peril-

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ous passage for those who dared to venture. Some Tlascalans led the way, followed by several soldiers, two of whom lost their balance and fell from this dizzy height to the bed of the stream, 100 feet below. Those who got across attacked the Indians in the rear, diverting them until a bridge was thrown over, when the city was quickly taken.

Countermarching from Cuernavaca, Cortés appeared once more among the cities within the valley brim, his nearest approach to the capital being at Coyoacan, whence he swung around westward to Tacuba, the scene of his first great defeat. On the way he passed the hill of Chapoltepec, the aqueduct from which to the capital (affording the Aztecs their sole supply of drinking-water) he partly destroyed. From Tacuba the little army passed northward and eastward, around the great lake, to Tezcoco, their point of departure, thus having completed the circuit of the valley and cut all connections leading from the capital outward to the cities roundabout.

This great work of isolating the city of Mexico from its tributaries had not been accomplished without most strenuous resistance from its occupants and defenders. The

## SIEGE OF THE AZTEC CAPITAL

Mexicans sallied out by thousands and tens of thousands; their war-canoes darkened the waters of the lakes. On several occasions they succeeded in taking prisoners for their sacrifices, and slew many of their enemies; but their attacks did not for a moment cause the intrepid Cortés to deviate from his plan of operations.

Three different times during this raid around the valley Cortés had been in dire peril. Once he was severely wounded, and twice was on the point of being captured, when his soldiers rescued him from the Aztecs, who were hurrying him off to the temple, a most acceptable victim for the sacrifice. Two of his attendants were less fortunate, being taken by the enemy and thrown upon the Sacrificial Stone before the very eyes of the sorrowing but helpless Spaniards, while they were viewing the capital from the summit of a *teocalli* in Tacuba.

The fourth attempt upon the life of Cortés, after he had set out to reduce the capital, was made by one of his own countrymen, a friend of Governor Velasquez, named Villafañá, who conspired with others to assassinate him while he was at dinner with his captains. The plot became known to one

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of his faithful soldiers, who warned him, and Villafañá was promptly arrested. A paper was found in his possession containing the names of the conspirators; but Cortés proceeded against the chief conspirator only, recognizing the necessity for an example, and hung him from a window of his apartment.

It was in the midst of perils such as these that Cortés perfected the plans he had made, and finally moved against the Aztec city, which lay in full view of Tezcoco. While he had been marching and fighting, his workmen and artisans had been constantly employed, so that there was no halt in the labor of preparation. From the distant forests of Tlascalá, Martín López and his Indian auxiliaries had brought down the timber for the thirteen brigantines. Eight thousand sturdy Tlascalans bore upon their backs all the timbers, ready shaped for setting up on the stocks; 2000 more were laden with provisions, while another body of 8000 came along as an escort. They were preceded by the 2000 *tamanes*, or burden-bearers, from Villa Rica, carrying the iron-work and rigging from the dismantled ships; and when this vast procession entered Tez-

## SIEGE OF THE AZTEC CAPITAL

coco, it was with shouts of triumph that might have been heard in the Aztec city across the lake. They were six hours in marching through the city, where they were reviewed by Cortés and his troops, while, to the stirring sound of drums, horns, and trumpets, they shouted at the top of their lungs: "*Tlascala, Castilla!*"—Tlascala, Cortés and Castile forever!

Martin Lopez put the ships together with the greatest speed once they were on the stocks; but he was constantly harassed by canoes filled with Mexican soldiers, who came over and, several times, set the ship-yards on fire. Cortés retaliated upon the Aztecs for these invasions by despoiling the vast fields of maize on the borders of the lake, which belonged to the priests of the temple in Mexico.

The brigantines were finally launched in the last week of April, a canal having been dug for the purpose, a mile and a half in length, twelve feet deep and broad. They floated out to the lake, to the roar of cannon and the clash of military music, each vessel receiving its crew and equipment without a day's delay, so perfectly had Cortés prepared for the event. And with the launching of

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these thirteen brigantines, which were of great importance in the operations against the Aztecs, the siege of Mexico may be said to have begun.



## XVII

### MONTEZUMA'S CITY DESTROYED

1521

AT a grand review of his army, held in Tezcoco the first week in May, Cortés found himself in command of nearly 900 soldiers, including 90 cavalry, 100 musketeers and cross-bowmen, and 700 infantry armed with lance and sword. His allies, at the outset, numbered 70,000, but during the siege, at times, they increased to more than 200,000.

He had three large cannon, fifteen brass field-pieces, and a good supply of bullets, but only 1000 pounds of powder, most of which had been manufactured with sulphur taken from the crater of Popocatapetl. A crew of twenty-five men was assigned to each brigantine, which also carried a cannon in the bow; and almost at the very start the Mexicans were to receive a lesson as to the destructiveness of this winged flotilla armed with artillery. Cortés himself commanded

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the naval armament, and upon setting out was confronted with an immense fleet of war-canoes, assembled by the king of Mexico to oppose his progress. The sea was smooth, a morning calm prevailed, and while the vessels lay inert the war-canoes swept forward with powerful strokes of the paddles, their crews yelling loudly in anticipation of victory. Suddenly the wind sprang up, the cannon, double-shotted, poured into the fleet their volleys of death, and the heavy brigantines ploughed through the canoes, overturning and crushing all in their way. The surface of the lake was tinged with blood and covered with mangled remains, while very few of the Aztec canoes returned to the island city from which they had emerged.

Another occurrence about that time which impressed the Indians deeply, was the execution of that fierce and warlike Tlascalan, Xicotencatl, who, taking advantage of the confusion attendant upon embarkation, deserted his command and set out for his home. Speedily learning of this defection, Cortés sent an *alguacil* and several cavalrymen in pursuit, with orders to overtake and "hang him on the spot." They obeyed their orders

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to the letter, and thus Cortés was rid of a formidable enemy, by whose death he came into possession of rare jewels and a hoard of gold; for he immediately appropriated all the private fortune of the chief as well as his family.

This was done in the face of the fact that Cortés was going forth to fight a foe by no means unprepared, and supported by allies whose racial and religious ties bound them closely to his enemies. During the months in which the Spaniards had been preparing for the siege, the Mexicans had put their city in a posture of defence. Cuitlahuatzin, Montezuma's successor, had perished of the small-pox, which had been introduced into Mexico by a negro who came with the army of Narvaez. The pestilence had spread over the country at an alarming rate, and had numbered thousands among its victims, including some of the Tlascalan nobles.

The throne vacated by the death of Cuitlahuatzin was filled by a son-in-law of Montezuma, named Guatemo, or Guatemotzin,<sup>1</sup> who

<sup>1</sup> Gua-te-mo, or Guatemo-tzin; also spelled *Quahtemotzin*. The termination *tzin*, a mark of reverence or rank.

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proved himself a worthy successor to the great monarchs who had preceded him. He was only twenty-three years old, but had received his training under the most valiant war chiefs, and entered into the defence of the city with spirit and energy. Wherever the Spaniards attacked, there they found hordes of Aztecs, massed in front or around them, always ready for defence and eager for an engagement. While himself invisible to the besiegers, Guatemotzin directed every movement with the practised eye of a veteran to whom all strategy seemed familiar.

In disposing of his forces for investment, Cortés assigned Alvarado, with 200 soldiers, 20,000 Tlascalans, and two cannon, to Tacuba, west of the city; Olid and Sandoval, each with an equal force, went to Coyoacan and Iztapalapan, at the south, to which place last named Cortés himself proceeded by water in the brigantines. Combining with Sandoval, he attacked the city fiercely and carried it by storm, after which, in conjunction with Olid, an advance was made upon the small fortress of Xoloc (Hó-loc), much nearer the capital, at the junction of the two southern causeways. Xoloc fell before the combined attack by



ALVARADO



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land and lake, the garrison was slaughtered, and the situation seized by Cortés as the site of his headquarters, where he maintained himself during the ninety days of the siege.

At Xoloc Cortés established what he called the "Camp of the Causeways," where, being at the junction of the two stone roads from Iztapalapan and Coyoacan (whence they continued as one highway to the capital), he held a strategic position superior to any other that could have been chosen. He could draw upon both Sandoval and Olid for troops, in an emergency, and he had also the support of the brigantines, which he divided into three small fleets.

The Spaniards had no sooner fixed their camps than they began assaults upon the city along the respective causeways. The distance that separated Alvarado from Sandoval, Cortés, and Olid was less than two leagues; or from Xoloc to Tacuba it was perhaps not more than four miles. There was, then, great rivalry as to which force should be the first to penetrate to the great square in the centre of the city, and this led to disaster. For, lying in wait for them, like a fierce spider in his web, was Guate-

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motzin, ready to pounce upon and slay as many as could be drawn within his ambush.

From a military point of view, the operations of Cortés up to a certain point, were faultless. If he had adhered to his original plan, which was to fill all the canals in front of the troops as fast as an advance was made, and destroy every building between the besiegers and the enemy, he might have saved many a life which was needlessly lost; but he was influenced by the pleadings of his captains and soldiers, and consented to an advance before the ground had been sufficiently cleared for the purpose. Every morning, at dawn, the Spaniards sallied forth preceded by thousands of the allies, who filled the canals and razed the structures impeding their progress. This was slow work for the impatient veterans, who wished Cortés to follow the method pursued by Alvarado, which was to post a guard at the most advanced point gained by the day's fight, and return to it the next morning, thus constantly advancing. In one of the raids by Cortés's soldiers the great square was reached, and, among other structures destroyed was the palace of Axayacatl, as well as Monteruma's aviary, which latter, being mostly of wood,



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went up in smoke and flames that were visible throughout the valley.

The allies of the Aztecs now began to show signs of yielding, and the beacon-fires and signal-smokes, with which they had communicated with Guatemotzin, were less frequently seen, while their embassies to Cortés, with offers of allegiance, arrived every day at the Camp of the Causeways. The Spanish army was thus greatly augmented, while the Aztecs were correspondingly weakened; but as an offset the Mexicans gained, by stratagem, one of the brigantines, in a naval fight, in which the gallant Pedro Barba, captain of the cross-bowmen, lost his life.

Strengthened as he was by the accessions from without, and spurred on by the rapid advances of Alvarado, Cortés finally consented to a concerted attack by all the forces, from Tacuba, Xoloc, and Tepajacac, converging upon the great square of the city as a common centre. Nearly twenty days had then gone by, and though they had been filled with constant fighting, the gains had been too slight to satisfy the soldiers. They clamored for an advance in force, and, yielding to their importunities, Cortés gave the fatal order. Accompanying the detachments

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in their march along the causeways was a fleet of nearly 3000 canoes filled with allies, and the brigantines, while 60,000 savages poured over the stone roadways, in anticipation of victims for their cannibal feasts.

There *was* feasting that night upon human flesh, but not to any great extent by the Indian allies, for the Mexicans, unknown to the Spaniards, had made every preparation for their defeat, and secured many a victim by their strategy. During the preceding night they had deepened the broadest canal across the main causeway, erected barricades, and posted thousands of their warriors in ambush, not only in canoes, but in the lateral streets and alleys. As the Spaniards and their hosts advanced, they feigned a retreat so skilfully as to draw their enemies into the great plaza, where they were wedged in dense masses by the crowding forward of the undisciplined allies, and then were entirely at Guatemotzin's mercy.

"Suddenly the king of Mexico's great horn was blown, giving notice to his captains that they were then to take their enemies prisoners or die in the attempt." The trumpet-call of Guatemotzin was the last appeal of the priests and nobles to their followers,

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and, inspired by the sound, the Aztecs burst from their places of ambush with a fury incredible. The Spaniards were thrown into confusion, and attempted to retreat, but were at first prevented by the masses of their allies, between them and the Camp of the Causeway. They were slaughtered by scores and by hundreds, their ears were assailed by a din of hideous war-cries, which prevented all orders from being heard, and into the canoes that fell upon their flanks more than seventy soldiers were dragged, despite their shrieks and struggles, and hurried away to the war-god's hideous temple. Cortés had remained with the rear-guard, but when he heard the tumult of retreat he hurried forward, though only in time to be caught in the press and himself seized by savage warriors, who dragged him from his horse and towards a canoe. He was disabled by a blow from a war-club, but while lying unconscious on the ground was rescued by two of his faithful followers, Olea and Lerma, assisted by a Tlascalan chief, who killed five of his assailants and bore him to safety; but when it was reached the gallant Olea, who had been mortally wounded, fell dead by his commander's side. A prolonged howl

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of rage went up at the escape of Cortés, who was well known to all the caciques, and who was the real object of attack in this ferocious onset. If the Aztecs had not been so anxious to capture him alive, they might have ended the siege of Mexico by a stroke of the sword when they had Cortés in their power. He escaped, thankful for his life, and withdrew with his shattered army to Xoloc, whither he was pursued by the Mexicans to the very gates.

Meanwhile, the same bloody scenes had been enacted in front of the troops commanded by Alvarado and Sandoval. Guatemotzin proved himself a great general on this day, if he had never been counted one before, for, from the *teocalli* summit, he directed the movements of three vast bodies of his warriors, and guided them all to victory.

After defeating Cortés, the Aztec chiefs who had driven him to his camp turned upon Alvarado and Sandoval, throwing in front of them five freshly severed and bleeding heads, telling them they were those of their commander-in-chief and his officers. That turned the tide of battle instantly, for, though it was usually necessary for the Spaniards to clear the causeway of the allies pre-

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ceding a retreat (to prevent confusion), on this occasion it was not, for, says the old historian, "the sight of the bloody heads had done it effectually; nor did one of them remain on the causeway to impede our retreat!"

The same subterfuge was practised on Cortés, also, for the Mexicans returned to Xoloc, and cast down before the walls other heads of Spaniards. And, as in the previous instance, they had exclaimed: "Malintzin! Malintzin!" so now they gleefully shouted: "*Tonatiuh!* Sandoval!" They hoped thereby to discourage the commanders and induce them to retreat; but they did not fully fathom those stern natures, which, though distressed beyond measure at the probable fate of their comrades in arms, remained stanch and inflexible. All their courage was demanded, however, when, in the evening of that dreadful day, they beheld a scene calculated to drive them to despair, and which should be described in the words of an eye-witness. In dire distress, nearly all of them suffering from wounds, with hardly any shelter, and meagrely supplied with food, the Spaniards were compelled to rest upon their arms. "Before we arrived at our

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quarters," says brave Bernal Diaz (who was with Alvarado at Tacuba), "and while the enemy were still in pursuit, on a sudden we heard their shrill timbrels, and the horrific sound of the great serpent-drum in the temple of the war-god. We all directed our eyes thither, and, shocking to relate! saw our unfortunate countrymen driven by force, cuffs, and bastinadoes to the place where they were to be sacrificed, which bloody ceremony was accompanied by the mournful sounds of all the instruments of the temple.

"We perceived that when they had brought the unfortunate victims to the flat summit of the temple, where were the adoratories, they put plumes on their heads, and fans in their hands, and made them dance before their accursed idols. When they had done this they laid them upon their backs, on the stone used for this purpose [the Sacrificial Stone], where they cut out their hearts, alive, and having presented them, yet palpitating, to their gods, they threw the victims down the steps by the feet, where they were taken by others of their priests."

Although the Tlascalans and others of the allies were wont to feast upon the limbs of Aztecs they had slain, and bore back to

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their camps every evening these gory evidences of their prowess, they were intimidated by this display of Mexican ferocity. And when Guatemotzin sent around the heads of horses and human captives, with the message that they must forsake the Spaniards, unless they too would share their doom, one cohort after another slunk away, until Cortés had few left besides a faithful remnant of Tlascalans, and Prince Ixtlilxochitl's 50,000.

But for an error of the Aztec priests, who (barbarians that they were), erred on the side of superstition, he might have been deserted by all his allies, and left to continue the siege unassisted. That he *would* continue, he had resolved; and never faltered, even when his men were all but terror-stricken at the horrid sights on the *teocalli*. But, in their arrogance, the priests ventured upon prophecy, and gave out that their gods had promised victory for the Mexicans within eight days of the last assault. When Cortés learned of it, he merely rested his soldiers (contenting himself with repelling the Aztec assaults, which were as fierce as ever), and did not make another advance into the capital until after the time had expired.

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Then he reminded his former allies of the false predictions, promising to overlook their desertion and richly reward them if they would rejoin him. Having, meanwhile, sent an army of relief to the Cuernavacans and Otomies, and thus shown himself willing and able to assist those who were faithful, he was soon overwhelmed with hordes of Indians, to the number (the old historians say), of above 200,000. The Aztecs were now "forsaken by all their former friends and vassals, surrounded by their enemies, and oppressed by famine," yet they would not for a moment entertain the thought of surrender. Famine, which had been their ally in reducing the Spaniards to terms on their former visit to the capital, was now the active instrument of their own destruction.

Realizing their pitiful condition, Cortés availed himself of the presence in his camp of some Mexican nobles, who had been captured, and despatched them to Guatemotzin with overtures of peace; but the Aztecs returned a defiant message, breathing the vengeance and slaughter, which, they declared, would soon be theirs to inflict, in the name of their gods. Then Cortés ordered



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a general advance, in pursuance of his original scheme, destroying all the buildings in front of him, and filling the gaps in the causeways with their débris. A horde of allies went with the Spaniards to perform the work of destruction, while the Mexicans taunted them by shouting: "Demolish, demolish, ye traitors! Lay the houses in ruin, which ye will have the labor of rebuilding afterwards!"

It grieved even the hard-hearted Cortés to destroy this city, which he called the "most beautiful thing in the world"; but by its destruction only could he bring the obdurate Mexicans to terms. They were entirely blockaded, and their supplies of water and food completely cut off. Reduced to the necessity of eating the bark of trees, roots, lizards, vermin of all sorts in their extremity (it has been asserted, as well as denied), they devoured human flesh other than that furnished the favored few from the captives sacrificed on the *teocallis*.

Again and again Cortés sent to Guatemotzin his proposals for surrender; but they were rejected with scorn, and the last unfortunate noble who bore them was sent by the enraged king to be sacrificed. The as-

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saults and advances of the Spaniards were but a repetition of their former exploits; so, also, were the frequent sacrifices of victims seized by the Aztecs but loathsome scenes which had been enacted before, and they do not demand further description.

The day arrived, at last, July 24th, when the Spaniards held three-fourths of the city in their grasp, and the forces that had so long and persistently fought their way from the opposite points of Tacuba and Iztapalapan met and fraternized in the central plaza. Cortés mounted the great *teocalli* in order that all might see him and to "vex the Aztecs," from that elevated situation thereafter directing the movements of the armies.

In one of the temples, which in turn was taken by assault and destroyed, the Spaniards found the heads of many of their soldiers, the hair and beard on which had grown very long since they were placed there, on beams in the "Room of Skulls." Tears came to the eyes of those stern veterans, and they sorrowed for their friends; but they did not make any direct reprisals upon the common people.

It was among the wretched populace in general—the innocent women and children,

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emaciated by famine and dying by degrees, thousands of them herded in a space sufficient for hundreds only—that the carnage was greatest, though the inexorable warriors perished by thousands. At a signal given by the firing of a musket, Cortés let loose the ferocious allies, who slaughtered in one day 8000 of these half-starved and defenceless wretches, and in another, 40,000. All who would have surrendered were butchered by the allies, while the warriors fought, to a man, until the heaps of slain were so high that the attacking savages could scarce see over them. Thus it went on, day after day: blood flowing in streams, precious lives going out in agony, while the stubborn, indomitable king and his nobles retreated still farther into the corner of the city remaining to them, which had now become their prison, and might be their tomb.

By his own evidence shall Cortés be judged. Nearly a year after the siege was ended he wrote to Charles V. a letter describing the closing scenes, and telling with brutal frankness what he did: "As soon as it was day, I caused our whole force to be in readiness, and the heavy guns to be brought out. . . .

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Being all assembled, and the brigantines drawn up ready for action, I directed that when they heard the discharge of an arquebuse, the land force should enter the small part of the city that yet remained to be taken, and drive the enemy towards the water, where the vessels lay. I enjoined much upon them to look for Guatemotzin, and endeavor to take him alive, as in that case the war would cease. I then ascended a terrace, and, before the combat began, addressed some of the nobles whom I knew, asking them why their sovereign refused to come to me, adding that there was no good reason why they should all perish, and that they should go to call him and have no fears.

“Two of them went to call the emperor, and after a short time they returned and said that he would by no means come into my presence, preferring rather to die; that his determination grieved them much, but that I must do whatever I desired. Seeing that this was his settled purpose, I told the nobles to return, then, and prepare for the renewal of the war, which I was resolved to continue until their destruction was complete! More than five hours had been thus

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spent, during which time many of the inhabitants were crowded together upon piles of the dead. Indeed, so excessive were the sufferings of the people, that no one can imagine how they were able to sustain them; and an immense multitude of men, women, and children, in their eagerness to reach us, threw themselves into the water and were drowned among the mass of dead bodies. It appeared that the number of them who had perished, from drinking the salt water, from famine or pestilence, amounted to more than *fifty thousand souls!* . . . In those streets where they had perished we found heaps of dead so frequently that a person passing could not avoid stepping upon them, and when the people of the city flocked towards us I caused sentinels to be stationed to prevent our allies from destroying the wretched persons who came out in such multitudes. I also charged the captains of our allies to forbid, by all means in their power, the slaughter of these fugitives; yet all my precautions were insufficient to prevent it, and that day more than fifteen thousand lost their lives! . . . As the evening approached and no sign of their surrender appeared, I ordered two pieces of ordnance

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to be levelled and discharged; but they suffered greater injury when full license was given to the allies to attack them than from the cannon, although the latter did them some mischief. . . . As this was of little avail, I ordered the musketry to be fired, when a certain angular space, where they were gathered together, was gained, and those that remained there yielded themselves without a struggle. . . .

“In the meantime, the brigantines suddenly entered that part of the lake, and broke through the fleet of canoes, the warriors who were in them not daring to make any resistance. It pleased God that the captain of a brigantine, named Garci Holguin, came up behind a canoe in which there seemed to be persons of distinction, and when the archers who were stationed in the bow of the brigantine took aim at those in the canoe, they made a signal that the emperor was there, that the men might not discharge their arrows. Instantly our people leaped into the canoe, and seized in it Guatemotzin and the lord of Tacuba, together with other distinguished persons.

“Immediately after this occurrence, Garci Holguin, the captain, delivered to me, on a

## MONTEZUMA'S CITY DESTROYED

terrace adjoining the lake, where I was standing, Emperor Guatemotzin, with other noble prisoners. As I, without any asperity of manner, bade him sit down, he came up to me and said, in his own tongue, that he had done all that he could in defence of himself and his people, until he was reduced to his present condition; that now I might do with him as I pleased. He then laid his hand on a poniard that I wore, telling me to strike him to the heart.

"I spoke encouragingly to him, and bade him have no fears. Thus the emperor being taken a prisoner, the war ceased at this point, which it pleased God, our Lord, to bring to a conclusion on Tuesday, August 13, 1521. So that from the day in which the city was first invested [May 30th, in that year], until it was taken, seventy-five days had elapsed, during which time your majesty will see what labors, dangers, and calamities your subjects endured; and their deeds afford the best evidence how much they exposed their lives."

This letter from Cortés to his sovereign was sent from the city of Coyoacan, May 15, 1522, and is of great value, not only as the testimony of the principal character in

## HERNANDO CORTÉS

the siege and conquest of Mexico, but on account of having been written so soon after the events transpired. Another eye-witness of all those scenes, the veteran Diaz, writing more than forty years later, after Cortés and nearly all the conquerors had passed away, says the siege really lasted ninety-three days.

“In the night after Guatemotzin was made prisoner, there was the greatest tempest of rain, thunder, and lightning, that ever was known; but all our soldiers were as deaf as if they had been for hours in a steeple, with the bells ringing about their ears. This was owing to the constant noise of the enemy for ninety-three days: shouting, whistling, calling, as signals to attack us on the causeways, from the temples of their accursed idols. The timbals, and horns, and the mournful sound of their great drum, and other dismal noises, were incessantly assailing our ears, so that day or night we could hardly hear each other speak.”



## XVIII

### THE COLONIZATION OF MEXICO

1521

WITH the capture of Guatemotzin the overthrow of the capital was assured, for all resistance ceased as soon as the Aztecs learned that he was a prisoner. He had been the life and soul of the defence, as Cortés had been that of the attack. During that memorable siege of nearly three months, more than 150,000 Mexicans had perished, many thousands of the allies, and about 200 Spaniards, of which number 100 had been sacrificed. Of the surviving Mexicans, indeed, there were few not wounded, or afflicted with disease the result of famine and pestilence.

The order was given to vacate the city that it might be cleansed of its impurities, and "for three days and nights the causeways were covered, from one end to the other, with men, women and children, so

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weak and sickly, squalid, dirty, and altogether pestilential, that it was a misery to behold them. Some miserable wretches were creeping about in a famished condition through the deserted streets; the ground was all broken up, to get at such roots as it afforded, the very trees were stripped of their bark, and there was not a drop of drinking-water in the city."

The Spaniards had fallen back to their old posts in the outskirts of the city, and while the wretched people fared forth in squalor and misery, seeking the open country, homeless and destitute, the victors celebrated their victory by a great feast at their quarters in Coyoacan. It was their first in many a month, and they were certainly entitled to it; but for many reasons, admitted one of the revellers afterwards, "it would have been much better let alone," for the wine that had been brought up from the coast, "was the cause of many fooleries and worse things: it made some leap over the tables who afterwards could not go out at the doors, and many rolled down the steps. . . . These scenes were truly ridiculous, and when the matter was brought to Cortés (who was discreet in all his actions), he affected to

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disapprove the whole, and requested our chaplain to offer a solemn thanksgiving, and preach a sermon to the soldiers on the moral and religious duties, which he did. Then a procession was formed, with crosses, drums, and standards, and after that Father Bartholomew preached, and we returned thanks to God for our victory."

While exhilarated by wine, "the private soldiers swore they would buy horses with golden harness; the cross-bowmen would use none but golden arrows; all were to have their fortunes made." When they recovered their senses, however, they found themselves possessed of little besides the armor they wore and the weapons they carried, while some were in debt even for them.

They sacked the ruined city, even while the people were deserting it, and the atmosphere was so tainted by decaying corpses that they could scarcely breathe; but found little to reward them for their pains. From the plundering of empty houses and corpses they turned upon Cortés and demanded that he should compel Guatemotzin to declare the hiding-place of his treasure; for the total amount of gold obtained did not exceed \$200,000 in value, or less than 100

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crowns to each soldier. They more than insinuated that Cortés was shielding his royal prisoner, in order that he himself might benefit, and at the proper time appropriate the treasure. In order to vindicate himself, Cortés basely and weakly gave Guatemotzin into the hands of his enemies, who, at the instance of the king's treasurer, drenched his feet with oil and exposed them to a slow fire. The torture was intense, but the emperor bore it with extraordinary fortitude, even mildly chiding his companion, the cacique of Tacuba (who shared this torment with him) for showing signs of weakness.

Nothing was gained by this inhuman treatment of their prisoner, except the information that what little treasure he possessed had been thrown into the deepest part of the lake, together with the cannon and other arms he had taken from the Spaniards. Expert divers searched the lake-bed for many days, by direction of the commander, but without discovering anything of great value, though an immense "sun" of solid gold (probably a calendar disk) was fished from a pond in Guatemotzin's garden.

In this connection we should note the

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fate of that treasure obtained at such cost of blood and misdirected energy. Having wheedled the soldiers into relinquishing their shares, small as they were, to their sovereign in Old Spain, Cortés collected spoils to the amount of several hundred thousand crowns, consisting of gold and pearls, jewels and beautifully wrought golden ornaments, and despatched it all to Charles V. As fate would have it, the ship in which it was sent from Mexico was captured by a French corsair. When the king of France finally gazed upon this wonderful loot of a kingdom of which he had never heard, he is said to have sent word to Charles V. that he would like to know by what authority he and the king of Portugal had divided the world between them without giving him a share, and that he "desired to see the will of our father Adam, to know if he had made them exclusively his heirs."

Together with the treasure went that precious letter from Cortés, written at Coyoa-can, when he "left nothing in his inkstand which could be of service to his interests." This despatch, strange to say, eventually arrived in Spain, where it effectually urged the cause of the soldiers, who had joined

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with Cortés in a petition to his majesty, praying that he might be made governor and captain-general of New Spain, and that all royal offices in the new colony might be bestowed upon the conquerors themselves, who alone were entitled to the same. Letters, petition, and treasure left Mexico in December, 1522, and in October of that year a royal commission creating Cortés as governor and captain-general had been signed by Charles, at Valladolid, which did not reach him until a long time after.

Meanwhile, the rebuilding of the city of Mexico had gone on with great rapidity. Within two months of its evacuation it had been cleansed and made ready for occupancy again, and within five months it gave promise, in its many splendid structures already erected, of a greater magnificence than the ancient capital could boast in its palmiest days. To those of his people who wished to reside in the city, Cortés gave *solares*, or lots of ground, and eventually 2000 families occupied the district assigned to the Spaniards, while 30,000 Indians dwelt in Tlaltelolco. As the Aztecs had predicted, the Tezcocan and other allies who had assisted in demolishing their city,

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were compelled by the Spaniards to labor for many months at its reconstruction; but so, also, were the Mexicans themselves, and with such severity were they treated that many of them perished from famine and fatigue.

The Cempoallan, Tlascalan, and Cholulan allies had been dismissed by Cortés, loaded with plunder of the sort to which the Spaniards attached no value, and were compelled to satisfy themselves with the thanks of the commander for their arduous labors throughout the war. With the exception of the Tlascalans, all were finally reduced to peonage, a system of slavery enforced by *encomiendas*. The gallant natives of the rugged country which had been so steadfast in its alliance with the conquerors were exempt from bondage, and, with this negative reward for their assistance, they retired to their homes, many of them, it is said, bearing with them the salted flesh of unfortunate Aztecs taken in battle.

Through the dispersion of the allies, and the alarming tidings which had been sent out by the Mexicans and their vassals during the progress of the siege, the whole empire had been informed of the triumph of

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the *teules* from across the sea. Several tributary nations sent embassies to inform themselves respecting the overthrow of Aztec dominion, and among these came the king of Michoacan, a state or province near the western ocean, who brought a donation of gold and pearls. So impressed was the king by what he saw and heard, that he voluntarily rendered his homage, and when he returned to his country was accompanied by a few Spaniards, who were the first to view the Pacific Ocean, where its waters laved the shores of middle Mexico. Nearly ten years had elapsed since brave Balboa first looked upon the great "South Sea," "from a peak in Darien," almost 1000 miles nearer the equator; but these men sent by Cortés took possession of it as though a new discovery, in the name of Spain's great sovereign. This expedition was among the first of many exploring parties sent out by Cortés to ascertain the extent and resources of his vast domain. For the downfall of the Aztec capital carried with it dominion over nearly the entire empire. Such Indians as did not send in their allegiance to him were attacked in their strongholds and subdued. Within a few months a rebellion had



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been repressed in the province of Panuco, another in Coatzacoalcos, and a fruitless expedition had been sent against the fierce Zapotecos, who fought with enormous spears having blades a yard in length.

Under the faithful Sandoval, soldiers were kept in active service in every part of the country, while Alvarado subjected the southern Indians of Oaxaca (pronounced Wā-hä'-ka) and Tehuantepec (Tay-wän'-tay-pec). In Oaxaca he found gold in such quantities that he commanded the native artisans to make his stirrups of that metal, and carried back an acceptable contribution to Cortés. He was so successful in this respect that he was given command of an expedition for the subjugation of Guatemala, and, after a series of battles with the hardy savages, succeeded in adding another vast province to the possessions of Spain.

In common with Columbus and all the explorers in the New World, Cortés desired to solve the "secret of the strait" which was supposed to connect the two great oceans. He was not aware of what was going on in the south, along the coast which Columbus had visited twenty years before; but he heard of rich gold deposits in the country

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now known as Honduras, and conceived an idea that the undiscovered passage between the Atlantic and the Pacific might exist in that region. At all events he resolved to send an expedition out in search of it. A large armament was placed under command of Cristoval de Olid, which reached Honduras by sea, after visiting Cuba and sailing around the peninsula of Yucatan. The reports from Honduras were vague, but indicated wonderful wealth, insomuch that the fishermen along its coast were said to use nuggets of gold to weight their nets. It was in January, 1524, that, prompted by avarice, Cortés despatched Olid to the conquest of Honduras, and set in motion a train of events which caused him infinite trouble and misery.

Gold and treasure were the mainsprings of motive with Cortés in sending out his expeditions. As already mentioned, he had secured possession of Montezuma's tribute-books in "picture-writing," in which were set down the places whence that monarch's golden treasure was obtained, and to those districts his trusty captains were sent. As the valley of Mexico contained neither mines, plantations, nor manufactures, says Bernal Diaz, the veterans did not take kindly to

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a settlement there, but watched for opportunities to visit the golden regions.

A great rebellion broke out in southern Mexico, and Sandoval marched through the coast country going as far as Coatzacoalcos, hanging several caciques and burning others at the stake, so that in a short time peace reigned supreme throughout the land. It was on this expedition that he made the discovery, not at all relished by Cortés, that Doña Catalina, the neglected wife of his commander, had arrived at Tabasco, whither she had come from Cuba. She was in search of her recreant lord and master, and of course Sandoval could do no less than provide her with an escort to the capital, for he was a gallant soldier and true cavalier.

"Cortés was very sorry for her coming," says the blunt old soldier, Díaz; "but he put the best face upon it, and received her with great pomp and rejoicings. In about three months after the arrival of Doña Catalina, we heard of her having died of an asthma!"

As it happened that, about this time, all the single men among the settlers newly arrived were "up in arms" against a decree by Cortés that all bachelors should be subject to a special tax, and all married men

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who did not bring their wives into the colony within eighteen months should forfeit their estates, this unexpected arrival of Doña Catalina caused much mirth in Mexico, and was looked upon as an instance of "poetic justice!"

Because the poor lady did not live long to enjoy her husband's honors, the enemies of Cortés charged that he had poisoned her! Several instances shortly afterwards occurred to confirm this impression, among them the sudden death of Francisco de Garay, one-time governor of Jamaica, a rival of Cortés in the colonization of the coast, who had been lured to the capital and, while a guest of the captain-general, had been seized with "pleurisy," expiring within four days of his arrival. A third victim was charged to his account, two or three years later, when a royal commissioner, Luis Ponce de Leon, who had been sent over to inquire into the administration of Cortés, was taken with a fatal illness and deceased before an inquiry could be set on foot. Notwithstanding that these people (whom it would serve the interests of Cortés best to have removed) had died of such diverse diseases as asthma, pleurisy, and ship-fever—as reported by the

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doctors in attendance—their takings-off were ascribed to the direct agency of their host, though the proof was insufficient to convict him.

It must be remembered that Cortés was beset by powerful enemies, not alone in Mexico, but also in Spain. The most powerful and malignant of these was Bishop Fonseca, of Burgos, who for many years was the actual head of the Spanish colonial department and ruled almost supreme. A staunch friend of Governor Velasquez, he had done his best to thwart the aims of Cortés and advance those of the former, but from the very beginning had himself been checkmated by his wily opponent in every move he made. Cortés had attempted by means of munificent gifts (as we have seen) to influence his sovereign in his favor; but Fonseca, with every ship under his supervision, and paid emissaries at every port of Spain, for a long time prevented these gifts, and the messengers with whom they were intrusted, from being presented at court. Some of the first deputies sent by Cortés were even cast into prison, so great was the influence of Fonseca. For months and years the fate of Cortés and his comrades trembled

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in the balance, the sport of an enemy adverse to their advancement, and unrecognized by a sovereign upon whom they had bestowed a realm of vaster extent than his combined possessions in Europe. He had not the capacity to estimate the importance of Mexico; but when, finally, the gifts arrived and were permitted to be shown him, he was moved to bestow rewards upon their donors.

We should recall, in this connection, the status of Cortés and his band of adventurers: their equivocal position, as explorers sent out by Velasquez (in whom authority was vested). They had severed all ties that connected them with him, as governor of Cuba, and had embarked upon an independent career, after throwing themselves upon the favor of the Spanish court and king. The controversy, then, was between Cortés and Velasquez, the latter supported by the all-powerful Fonseca, and the former without any foreign aid of importance, but seeking the support and countenance of his sovereign.

Fonseca so far prevailed, in 1521, as to have a commissioner sent out to "institute an inquiry into the general's conduct, to

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suspend him from his functions, and even to seize his person and sequester his property, until the pleasure of the Castilian court should be known." This commissioner was one, Tapia, whose warrant was signed by the royal regent in April, 1521, and who arrived at Villa Rica in December.

So many obstacles of a diplomatic nature were thrown in his way, by the wary and yet courteous Cortés, that the feeble Tapia fell ill from disappointment. Finally, the captains of Cortés at the coast wrote him of all that had passed, and recommended him to send a goodly quantity of golden ingots, to try their effect in mollifying the fury of the would-be governor. These arrived by the return of the messenger, and with them they bought from Tapia his negroes, three horses, and one of his ships. In the other ship the commissioner himself embarked, and set sail for the island of Santo Domingo.

This was not the first time (as we know) that the astute Cortés had submerged his enemies beneath a golden flood; and, as the sequel shows, even the puissant Charles could not withstand such an inundation as Cortés now poured upon him. Making another forcible appeal to his comrades and fellow-

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colonists, he got together 100,000 crowns in gold and sent this sum to the king, together with a golden culverin, or small cannon, superbly wrought by native artisans, and inscribed with these lines:

“Th’ immortal Phoenix, peerless, sweeps the air;—  
To Charles is given boundless rule to bear.  
Zealous to conquer, at my king’s command,  
I in my services unrivalled stand.”

Not a word was said of the sturdy soldiers through whose aid Cortés had attained the dizzy height whence he addressed his sovereign with such assurance. They were now impoverished, and were treated with the same contempt that Charles himself bestowed upon the golden culverin, which he looked over carelessly, and then presented to a certain don of Seville. Collectively, however, all his treasure, the plunder of murdered Mexicans, in the first place; in the second, mostly the pillage of poor soldiers, had a favorable effect upon the emperor. He had the grace to review the matter respecting Cortés and his companions, and to refer it to a special commission, which not only acquitted him of treason to his sovereign and rebellion against Velasquez, but confirmed his



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previous appointment as captain-general and justice - in - chief of the vast region he had subjugated. With the appointment was bestowed a salary sufficient to the maintenance of a splendid state, and almost unlimited authority over the people, both Spaniards and Mexicans.

## XIX

### A PERILOUS EXPEDITION

1524-1526

CORTÉS was now established in power, but only as a military governor, while he had hoped to be a viceroy at least. He was assisted in the extension of Spanish authority on a basis of security, in the distribution of lands to colonists, and the founding of towns and settlements, by the *ayuntamiento*, or body of magistrates, which had been appointed at the very beginning of his Mexican career, at Vera Cruz.

Some of their ordinances were so salutary that they are in force to-day, after the lapse of nearly four centuries; but it cannot be affirmed that all of them were righteous, for they sanctioned, particularly, the iniquitous system of *encomiendas*, which had caused the extermination of the native West-Indians. By this system almost countless Mexicans were doomed to hopeless slavery. Only the

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Tlascalans were relieved from rendering their unpaid services to cruel taskmasters; and if the Mexicans had not been a hardier people than their insular neighbors, they would have shared their fate.

Throughout the whole extent of subjugated Mexico, which comprised a country with a coast-line, on the Atlantic, 1200 miles in length, and on the Pacific 1500 miles, the genius of Cortés was paramount, even to its remotest bounds. Under the supervision of Guatemotzin, the Aztecs and their former vassals labored at the up-building of the island capital. The "religious men," brought to Mexico through the urgent prayers of Cortés, entered with fanatic zeal into the conversion of the natives, destroying their temples and their idols, and bringing them by thousands under the wing of their church. While all these things were going on; while the soil was being tilled, and the mines exploited for their wealth of gold and silver, expeditions for exploration and discovery were being sent out in every direction.

It was but natural that Cortés should be assailed by the envious and discontented, and the day of reckoning was yet to come;

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but he brought his calamities to a crisis by a voluntary act of his own. It may be recalled that he had sent one of his captains to Honduras, with instructions to found a colony there and exploit such mines as might be discovered. Early in 1524 he learned that this captain, Christopher de Olid, had rebelled and asserted independence. This action could not be tolerated, of course, and so Cortés sent his kinsman, Las Casas (who had been the bearer of the despatches from Spain announcing his elevation to the captain-generalcy), on a punitive expedition to Honduras, with five ships and 100 men. This fleet was wrecked on the Honduras coast; but Las Casas secured possession of Olid, through treachery, and cut off his head. He then re-established the discarded authority of his commander; but Cortés, hearing only of the disaster that had overtaken his ships, and believing that the entire force had perished, resolved to set out for Honduras and avenge himself.

Such a proceeding seems absurd, especially in view of the fact that officers of the king had recently arrived charged with an inquiry into the governor-general's doings. But it was characteristic of Cortés to transact im-

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portant business at first hand; besides, his ire had been aroused, and again, he wished to examine into the resources of Honduras, especially its mines of gold.

The distance to Honduras by sea, through the Gulf of Mexico and around the peninsula of Yucatan, was about 2000 miles. By land (but nearly all the way through a trackless wilderness), it was more than 1500. Distance did not matter with Cortés, so he set out on his wild-goose chase through the wilderness. If the conception of this expedition might be termed foolish, the manner of its equipment was certainly so. It would seem that he took with him nearly all the useless and superfluous persons in Mexico, for, besides his fighting force of 250 soldiers and 3000 Indians, he included a steward and a butler, a chamberlain, grooms, jugglers, falconers, puppet-players, priests ("two reverend fathers, Flemings, good theologians, to preach the faith"), a confectioner, pages of the household, and armor-bearers. He also carried with him his valuable service of gold and silver, and a "keeper-of-the-plate" to care for it, while there were musicians, jesters, and stage-dancers to drive away his melan-

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choly. Nearly all these persons died by the way, during the twenty months of that terrible march through the forests, and most of the equipment was lost or consumed; but the service of plate was saved to the end, and went to Spain from Honduras as "evidence of the wealth" of that country.

Though the city of Mexico was strongly garrisoned and the Aztecs in complete subjection, Cortés took along with him his royal prisoner, Guatemotzin, and the cacique of Tacuba, as hostages in case of an uprising of the Indians. These, too, were superfluous cares on the march; but he got rid of them before it was over, as will shortly be narrated.

Striking due south from Mexico city, its progress retarded by a large herd of swine, the unique procession finally reached the province of Tabasco, in which (it will be remembered) Cortés had his first encounter with the natives. Here were living several of the conquerors, including our old friend Bernal Diaz, the historian, afterwards governor of Guatemala. They had secured allotments of land, and were settled down to a life of peace; but they were compelled by

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Cortés to furbish up their armor, saddle their horses, and accompany him on the journey. After a good deal of grumbling they did so, for the commands of the captain-general must be obeyed; but Diaz had a belated revenge, forty years later, in "writing up" the expedition.

Cortés deprived Tabasco province of the old soldiers, but he left there, by the way of exchange, his faithful Marina, who, now that her services could be dispensed with, was married to a cavalier of his army and given a valuable estate in the home of her ancestors. This is the last we shall hear of "Doña Marina," or *Malinche*, who had rendered inestimable service to the Spaniards as interpreter, and but for whom the conquest of Mexico by Cortés might not have been achieved. Her son, however, Don Martin Cortés, clung to the fortunes of his father, sharing in his honors and obloquy. He lived to become a man of mark in Mexico, but at one period of his life, was accused of treason to the state and put to the torture.

The days, the weeks, and the months passed by, and still the steadily diminishing army of Cortés floundered through the tropi-

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cal forests of southern Mexico. No other portion of that country presents so many natural obstacles to travel as that covered by Cortés in his terrible march across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Tabasco, and Chiapas, with their vast labyrinth of rivers and swamps

The rivers seemed innumerable, and some of them were nearly impassable. No man less determined than Cortés could have piloted that motley band through such dangers as were encountered. Again and again they were compelled to construct bridges of trees that grew along the banks of deep and rapid rivers, and pass over on these frail supports, trembling beneath the tread of their horses, only to find the labor must be immediately repeated. Sometimes they were obliged to swim across streams infested with alligators, which devoured their hogs and such horses as were disabled.

The commander provided in advance for some contingencies, as, for instance, at Coatzacoalcos River were found canoes laden with provisions, which had been sent from the settlement at its mouth; farther on again, 300 canoes, manned by Indians, lay awaiting the arrival of the Spaniards, to



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ferry them across a rapid stream. But the time came when all signs of settlements were left behind, and ahead of them lay the vast and unexplored forest, with here and there an Indian hut or village, the only trails between them being waterways. Famine assailed the wandering army, some of the Spaniards and many of the Mexicans falling from exhaustion and dying in their tracks. In this extremity the Mexicans resorted to cannibalism. "Some of their chiefs seized upon the natives of places through which we passed," says Diaz, "and concealed them with the baggage, until through hunger they had killed and eaten them, baking them in a kind of oven made with heated stones which are put under ground."

On inquiry being made, it was found that the practice had become quite prevalent, and, despite the misery all were in, Cortés caused the chief cannibal to be burned alive! Whether the surviving cannibals ate their barbecued cacique does not appear; but it is not likely that this dreadful warning had the desired effect. Famine had made them desperate, and to such an extent was the army reduced that even the soldiers bade Cortés defiance when, at one time, some

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scouts brought in a quantity of provisions, which they seized and devoured. Cortés and Sandoval complained that they had not eaten, that day, so much as a handful of maize.

Still Cortés preserved his courage and clung to his scheme for revenge upon Olid, never once hinting of returning. Onward, ever onward, pressed the starving company, guided solely by a native map, rudely drawn, obtained from the Indian traders of Tabasco, and a compass in the possession of the leader.

One by one, and then by the score, perished the weaker members of the company, such as the buffoon, the pages, and the musicians. As for these last, says the chronicler of the march, "as for our poor musicians with their instruments, their sackbuts, and their dulcimers, they felt the loss of the regales and feasts of Castile; and now their harmony was stopped, excepting one only, whom the soldiers used to curse whenever he struck up, saying "it was maize they wanted, and not music."

Though with starvation staring him in the face, his friends falling in death around him, and dangers thickening at every step, Cortés

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faltered not for a moment. The instinct of self-preservation was yet dominant within him, as shown by the most perfidious act in his long career of cruelty and crime — the execution of Guatemotzin. His royal prisoner had survived nearly four years the conquest of his capital, and Cortés had compelled him to share this comfortless journey in order to obviate a possible rising of the Aztecs during his absence.

Guatemotzin could not fail to perceive the weak and emaciated condition of the Spaniards, outnumbered, as they were by the Mexicans, ten to one, and he would have been more, or less, than human not to have considered that his time had come for revenge. When, therefore, it came to the ears of Cortés that he intended to destroy the entire force of Spaniards, then return to the capital and head an insurrection of his former subjects, the suspicions of the commander were confirmed. Being seized and accused, the royal warrior protested his innocence, and proof was lacking of a conspiracy; yet he and the cacique of Tacuba were sentenced to death. They were hanged from the limb of a ceiba-tree, in the forest-wilderness of Acalan, on a day in March, 1525.

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As he was being led to execution, Guatemotzin turned to Cortés and said: "Malintzin, now I find in what your false words and promises have ended—in my death! Better would it have been had I fallen by my own hand than to have trusted myself to you in my own city of Mexico. Oh, why do you thus unjustly take my life? May God demand of you this innocent blood!"

The shadow of that horrible crime hung thick and black about Cortés, who alone was responsible for it, and for many nights he could not sleep, but wandered about as one distraught. In one of these nocturnal ramblings he fell over the parapet of a ruined temple and received severe injuries, which he tried to conceal from his men, well aware that they knew his conscience was torturing him, but too proud to admit the fact. The Mexicans might now have mutinied, even without their king and leader, but "the wretches were so exhausted by famine, sickness, and fatigue" that they thought only of keeping their souls within their bodies.

The ruined temple in which Cortés received his injuries may have been one of the great "Palenque" group, near which, it is known, he and his army passed; but no mention is

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made of the deserted city by name. The Indians regarded these ruins with veneration, as they also considered Cortés to be in league with supernatural powers through the medium of his compass. When accused of sharing in the conspiracy, these simple Mexicans begged him to look in his "mirror" and see for himself that they were loyal. They stood by him to the last, and after Honduras was reached were left to shift for themselves, such was his appreciation of their loyalty.

Beyond Acalan province, after crossing a great river, the making of a bridge for which occupied them three days, the Spaniards came to the lake of Peten, with a wonderful island of *teocallis* in its centre. Here they tarried several days, and one of the horses, being disabled, was left with the natives. Cortés enjoined them to care for the animal tenderly, and they did so to the best of their ability, setting before it flowers and fowls, basins of soup, and broiled fish; but without avail, for it died. Then they made a statue of it, which, as "the god of thunder and lightning," the people of Peten worshipped (it is said) for nearly 100 years. This incident shows what a wild and little-known region was this traversed by Cortés,

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which remained for a century thereafter unvisited.

As the soldiers descended towards the Gulf of Honduras they were drenched by the floods of the rainy season, which fell day and night, and caused the rivers to increase in volume so that several men and horses were drowned in crossing them. They scaled precipices, crossed great plains beneath the blaze of a torrid sun, and at one time were twelve days in passing over a mountain of flints, the sharp stones of which cut their horses' hoofs to pieces.

At last the forlorn remnant of the band arrived at Golfo Dulce, on the opposite shore of which was the colony Olid had founded. Scouts were sent ahead, and the army placed in order for an attack upon the colonists, whom Cortés supposed still in rebellion. Great was his surprise to learn, on their return, that Olid was dead, having been slain by Las Casas, and that all the several settlements, though on the verge of famine, were then loyal to Cortés and the king.

What his feelings were, may better be imagined than described; but he must have felt disgusted with himself, after his months of wandering, his sufferings beyond imagin-

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ing, his terrible losses of life and property, to find that he had been all the time chasing a veritable will-o'-the-wisp. He had travelled more than 1500 miles, and had tested his and his soldiers' powers to the limit of human endurance, in order to punish a traitor who was already dead, before he left the capital!

Notwithstanding his great labors on this journey, however, Cortés had no sooner learned the facts, than he set on foot several expeditions for discovery and conquest, taking an active part in the chiefest, and in one receiving a severe wound in the face from an Indian arrow. His name and prestige accomplished more than legions of men could have achieved, for there was no Indian so wild and ignorant that he had not heard of terrible Cortés the Conqueror!

He formed the intention of pushing the conquest of Honduras, Guatemala, and adjacent provinces southward towards the narrowing of the isthmus at Nicaragua and Panama, but by chance one day discovered colonists sent up from that region by Pedrarias, the man who had beheaded Balboa.

Perceiving that the great southern region had been, in a sort, pre-empted, Cortés aban-

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doned his intention of conquest in that direction and resolved to return to Mexico. No news had come from the capital since his arrival in Honduras; but finally, one evening, as he and some companions were walking the beach at Truxillo, they espied a sail. A ship was standing into the bay, the captain of which, when he reached the shore, hastened to deliver to Cortés some despatches from Mexico, by way of Havana.

"As soon as Cortés read them he was overwhelmed with sorrow and distress," says the ever-faithful Diaz. "He retired to his apartment, where we could hear, from his groans, that he was suffering the greatest agitation. He did not stir out for an entire day; at night he confessed his sins, after which he called us together and read the intelligence he had received, whereby we learned that it had been universally reported and believed in New Spain that we were all dead, and our properties, in consequence, had been sold by public auction."

This was only half the story, for from his father, in Spain, Cortés learned that intrigues were going on against him at court, while in Mexico there was a condition of affairs bordering upon anarchy. It was small conso-



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lation for Cortés to reflect that for the conditions in Mexico, as for the disasters to his expedition, he alone was responsible. When he left the capital he had placed in charge two deputies, Estrada, the treasurer, and Albornos, the *contador*; but two other persons, who had accompanied him a short distance on the expedition, had wheedled themselves into his confidence and obtained power to supersede the deputies. Two parties were formed; civil war had resulted; there was bloodshed in the streets of the capital; the Indians of three provinces had revolted, and defeated the forces sent to subdue them.

Plunged into deep dejection by these tidings, Cortés knew not what to do, at one time deciding to stay and form a new confederation in Central America, again resolving to make all haste for Mexico. He was finally urged to the latter course, and, after several ineffectual efforts to embark, at last set sail from Truxillo on April 25, 1526, arriving at Vera Cruz a month later, and at the capital the third week in June, after an absence of more than twenty months.

## XX

### LAST VOYAGES AND LAST DAYS

WHEN Cortés landed in Mexico he was a mere wreck of his former self, worn and haggard, and so changed that no one knew him. His face was wan, his form emaciated; but his deep voice still retained the magic of its tones, and when the people heard it they recognized him instantly. He would have remained incognito, fearing violence from his enemies, but his friends would not have it so. From house to house, from town to village, along the route to the capital, ran the message, "Cortés has returned." The immediate answer to it was a spontaneous welcome such as no man in Mexico ever received before. Feasts and fêtes succeeded, all along the way, and when at last he arrived at Tezcoco and took possession of his palace there, the enthusiasm of the populace burst all bounds. Bells rang and cannon

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roared their welcomes, the air resounded with acclaim. The chief enemies of Cortés were now in prison, the two arch conspirators against him confined in wooden cages, and for a time it seemed as if he had reached the zenith of glory and power. But while this joyous demonstration appeared to voice the feelings of the people, there was no lack of evidence that it was false. The very palace in which Cortés resided, and which he had built for himself in the centre of the city, had been sacked during his absence, and the ground around it dug over for the treasure which it was supposed he had concealed. All his portable property had been seized and squandered, the major portion in celebrating his funeral services and "in purchasing masses for the salvation of his soul."

The natives were no longer at enmity with Cortés. They had strewn his pathway from the coast with flowers, had been loudest in greeting; but from his own countrymen he experienced the harshest treatment. Scarcely had the sound of rejoicings died away, than word came from the coast that a royal officer had arrived from Spain to establish a *residencia*—or an official inquiry—into the affairs of Cortés, who was charged with ap-

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appropriating the treasures of Guatemotzin, of seeking to maintain himself independently of the crown, of withholding its revenues, and many other things.

He knew the futility of opposing the emperor's commands, so he politely welcomed the royal commissioner, Luis Ponce de Leon, attended him to his palace, and set forth a sumptuous banquet in his honor, at Izta-palapan. Several of the commissioner's company were made very ill by partaking of some delicious cheese-cakes at this banquet, and as the gentleman himself was seized with a mysterious and fatal malady, soon after he opened the court of inquiry, rumors soon filled the air that Cortés had poisoned him. The sudden deaths of Doña Catalina and Garay were brought to mind, and at a later inquiry an official charge was made against him as having been instrumental in causing them. The successor of De Leon took the most sinister view. He persecuted Cortés in many ways, and finally issued an order for his expulsion from the capital. So far as the court of inquiry had proceeded, Cortés had been vindicated and the charges brought against him refuted; but he was weary of the perpetual assaults upon his integrity. He

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resolved to set out immediately for Spain, and demand justice from his majesty; although it has been made to appear that his going thither was not a voluntary act, but had been brought about by machinations at the court.

One thing very conspicuous in the attitude of Cortés is his respect, even reverence, for the authority of his sovereign. He promptly obeyed the royal commands, and his restraint in this instance may be appreciated when it is recalled that the judicial commissioners had authority (he was told) to confiscate his properties, and even to cut off his head, if found guilty of the charges urged against him.

Though the priests and politicians had absorbed much of his money, Cortés had sufficient available to purchase and provision two vessels, in which he set sail for Spain. After a voyage of forty days he arrived at the port of Palos, in the last of December, 1527, and thence set out to visit the court. From this same port of Palos, thirty-four years before him, Christopher Columbus had started on a similar journey, after returning from his first voyage to America. Both Columbus and Cortés were everywhere received with acclaim by the

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people, and both took with them specimens of the new country's products, as well as Indian captives. Cortés took gems, gold, and the famous feather-work; while as types of the natives he had several Aztec and Tlascalan chiefs, and a son of Montezuma.

Arrived at court, Cortés pleased the emperor by his engaging presence, for, as one of his admirers once remarked, he "must have been for a long time past exercising himself in the manners of a great man." He threw himself at his sovereign's feet, but Charles graciously commanded him to rise, and smilingly received from his hands the memorial in which was narrated the exploits of the conquerors, and especially those of Cortés himself, in winning a vast empire for Spain. At this first reception by the court, and on subsequent occasions, Charles conversed familiarly with Cortés, and sought his advice as to the best methods of government in Mexico. He showed him many marks of esteem, and when Cortes fell sick of a fever the haughty monarch condescended to visit him at his lodgings, which was considered a crowning act of graciousness, and turned the tide of adulation full upon Mexico's conqueror. A more striking proof

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of the monarch's appreciation was afforded by his investing Cortés with the title of "Marquis of the Valley" (of Mexico), carrying with it a vast domain in Oaxaca, containing twenty towns and as many thousand Indian vassals.

The presence of Cortés at court had not only allayed the emperor's suspicions, but caused a reaction in his favor. The honors heaped upon him, also, turned his head, and he "began to assume haughty airs" towards others not so fortunate. He aspired to be viceroy of New Spain, or at least its governor-in-chief; but Charles looked coldly upon this proposition, though he created him captain-general, and permitted him to prosecute discoveries in the great South Sea. He could colonize, and himself rule such colonies as he might establish, while of all his discoveries he was to receive one-twelfth as his own.

One other thing which Cortés ardently aspired to was an alliance with the nobility. This aspiration was gratified by the noble house of Bejar. The duke of Bejar had been his friend in adversity, and his niece, the young and beautiful Juana de Zuniga, gladly gave her hand to the conqueror of

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Mexico. Despite his many adventures and escapades, his years (which were now forty-five), and the privations he had undergone, Cortés was still an attractive man; perhaps all the more attractive because of his experiences. There was no thought of the disparity in age or rank when he led his youthful bride to the altar, for the glamour of the gems he had presented to her attracted the attention of all that brilliant throng assembled for the nuptials. "They were the spoils of Indian princes, whom Cortés had murdered to obtain them; but they shone resplendent on the person of fair Juana de Zuniga, and so excited the envy of Queen Isabella that, from being the friend of the Conqueror, she became his enemy, for they were the most magnificent jewels in Old Spain."

The jealousy of the queen, on account of the jewels, moved her, it is said, to prohibit the entrance of Cortés and his bride into the city of Mexico, when at last, wearying of dancing attendance upon the court, he sailed again for the scenes of his greatest adventures. The emperor had left for Flanders, so nothing more was to be gained by remaining. Together with his wife, the marquesa,



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and his aged mother (who was now a widow, Don Martin Cortés having died in 1527), the hero of Mexico sailed for Hispaniola, whence, after tarrying a while, he departed for Vera Cruz, where he landed in July, 1530. He returned to Mexico with a large retinue of menials, as became a man with an income exceeding \$100,000 per annum, and with a title to maintain. Interdicted by the queen's orders from entering the capital, he took up his residence for a time at Tezcoco, where he held splendid court, assisted by his lovely bride. To such an extent was the city of Mexico represented there, by its most distinguished cavaliers, that the governor issued an edict imposing a fine upon such natives as should follow their example. This governor, Nuño de Guzman, was the head of the royal *audiencia*, or court of inquiry, into the administration of Cortés, which had been sent out from Spain in 1527. He was an inveterate enemy of the conqueror, and while in supreme power pursued him with vindictive energy. The suggestions of this *audiencia*, which were inimical to Cortés, were never acted on by the sovereign, and it was soon superseded by another at the head of which was a friend

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of the marquis, the good bishop of Santo Domingo. The persecution of Cortés was relaxed; but there arose differences between him and the new *audiencia* as to the apportionment of his Indian vassals, and finally, disgusted at the treatment he received in the capital, he left it and went to Cuernavaca, where he had vast estates, and where he built a princely palace.

The reader will recall the manner in which Cuernavaca was taken by the Spaniards under Cortés, while preparations for the investment of Mexico were going on: how the soldiers crossed one of the two deep *barrancas*, or ravines, between which it lay, on the trunks of trees which met above the abysmal chasm. Its beauty of position and the fertility of the smiling valleys sloping to the south attracted Cortés to the spot, who, after shaking the dust of the capital from his feet, established himself here and engaged in agriculture with an ardor only surpassed by that with which he had formerly pursued the Aztecs.

The fact that Cortés chose this bit of earthly paradise as a retreat for his old age indicates that, after all, he loved the beautiful in nature. The veritable castle he

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constructed, in which he planned the development of his baronial estate, and his expeditions to the Gulf of California, still stands, in a well-chosen spot on the brink of the *barranca* once crossed by the tree-trunk bridge. There it commands a peerless view, comprising the great valleys, the mountain passes, and the snow-crowned dome of Popocatepetl.

This period of his life reminds us of the peaceful and quiet existence led by him in Cuba, with his first wife, Doña Catalina, before ambition robbed him of his rest. He had achieved fame and wealth, and now, apparently contented, he devoted himself to agriculture, the noblest of professions. He introduced merino sheep into Mexico, and was the first to bring the sugar-cane into that country. Cortés became a successful planter; but life in Cuernavaca was too tame and tranquil for the restless conqueror of Mexico, who possessed royal authority to discover and colonize new lands, and to explore the great South Sea.

In 1527, the year he went to Spain, he had fitted out a squadron for the Spice Islands, and was preparing another when he left the country. He intended it should await his

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return from Spain; but the *audiencia* interfered, called away his workmen, and allowed the ships to decay.

In 1532 and 1533, availing himself of the powers vested in him by his sovereign, he sent out several ships from the port of Aca-pulco; but nothing of importance resulted save the barren discovery of Lower California. One of the vessels was wrecked on the coast of New Galicia, which territory was under the rule of Guzman, who promptly seized it as a prize. As he refused to release it, Cortés immediately marched against him with a small army, recovered the ship, and joined it to another squadron which he had prepared in his own port of Tehuantepec. This, his fourth venture upon the little-known waters of the great Pacific, he commanded himself, and such was the prestige attaching to his name, even at this date, fifteen years after the conquest of Mexico (for this was in 1537), that volunteers flocked to his standard from every quarter. Twice as many offered as he could carry in his ships, and he eventually sailed with 400 colonists and 300 slaves to form a settlement in Lower California.

This expedition ended in disaster, like the

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others, for many of the colonists were killed by Indians, or perished of starvation, and the survivors were finally brought back to Mexico. Cortés himself preceded them, after having organized a search for some of his ships, which were wrecked on the coast of Jalisco, and doing everything he could to place the wretched colony upon a firm foundation. He did not return, however, until the marquesa, alarmed at his long absence without tidings, petitioned the viceroy to send out ships in search of him.

Still undaunted, and filled with the purpose of exploiting the pearl fisheries of the great gulf (which have since become so famous), the marquis sent out a fifth and last expedition, in command of Captain Ulloa. Yielding to the persuasions of his wife, he did not accompany this squadron, and it was fortunate for him, as the flag-ship never returned to port. In a certain sense this enterprise resulted in greater rewards to science than the others, for Ulloa explored the Gulf of California, following all the indentations of its western shores, and the opposite coast of the peninsula as far up as the twenty-eighth degree of north latitude.

These various maritime ventures of Cortés

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in the Pacific cost him upward of 300,000 crowns, and the net results to him consisted in being known as the discoverer of Lower California, and in having the gulf named after him, the "Sea of Cortés." Although he still held a vast extent of landed property around Cuernavaca and in the marquisate of Oaxaca, his several expeditions and his extravagant mode of living had plunged him deeply into debt. Writing to the president of the royal council of the Indies in 1538, he says: "I have enough to do to maintain myself in a village (probably Cuernavaca), where I have my wife, without daring to reside in the capital city, or come to it, as I have not the means to live in it; and if sometimes I come, because I cannot avoid doing so, and remain in it a month, I am obliged to fast for a year."

That this dismal tale should be taken "with a grain of salt" appears from his condition three years later, when, notwithstanding his plea of poverty, he carried on his person jewels of inestimable value.

As the owner of a castle and estate in Cuernavaca, palaces in Tezcoco and the capital, silver-mines in Zacatecas, and gold deposits in Oaxaca, the marquis could not have

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been in very straitened circumstances it would appear. He even contested with the viceroy Mendoza (who had represented the king in Mexico since 1535) the honor of sending an expedition in search of the "Seven Cities of Cibola," then recently brought to light by a wandering monk. Coming into collision with the viceroy over this affair, and regarding his claims as an interference with his rights, Cortés determined to sail for Spain and in person state his many grievances to the emperor.

Leaving the marquesa in charge of his properties, and taking with him their oldest son and heir, Don Martin Cortés, then eight years of age, he embarked at Vera Cruz sometime in 1540. Arrived in Spain, he had the chagrin to find the emperor absent (for he seems always to have been either setting out for, or arriving from, Flanders), and, Queen Isabella having died the year before, there was no one in authority to give him a hearing.

There was no lack of courtesy on the part of the court, for that cost little, and, moreover, was a Spanish prerogative; but he received nothing more, though he danced attendance upon it nearly seven years. The

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emperor returned in due time, but he was a different Charles from the one who had seated Cortés at his right hand in public and had called upon him at his lodgings when ill. He was the same sovereign, but Cortés had no longer anything to offer. He had run his career, was old and useless, and, moreover, it was Peru now, and not Mexico, that sent the gold-laden galleons to Spain.

He allowed Cortés to accompany the expedition to Algiers, in 1541, for the suppression of the Algerian pirates. But the expedition was a failure, the ship containing the marquis and his son was wrecked, and they only escaped by swimming ashore, narrowly missing being captured by the pirates. The marquis had with him, on this occasion, those gems beyond price which he had presented to his bride, and which he had better have left with the marquesa, for, though bound tightly to his arm, somehow they were lost in the sea. "This loss made the expedition fall more heavily on the Marquis of the Valley," says his chaplain, "than on any other man in the kingdom, except the emperor"; but it did not affect him more than the indifference of Charles to his suggestions. He offered to lead a forlorn hope



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against the place, if he could be supported. Not only was the offer ignored, but when a council of war was called, he was not even invited to a seat at the board. The greatest captain Charles V. ever owned (soul and body, body and soul) was treated by him like the dogs that fed from his table!

Yet this was the Cortés, and this the king, of whom Spain's great poet wrote:

*"Al rey infinitas tierras,  
Y a Dios infinitas almas."*

"To his king he gave unbounded countries, to his God innumerable souls":

It is a privilege of the poet to exaggerate, but not of the historian. This anecdote related by Voltaire may be fictional but intrinsically it is true: After long lingering at the court, one day Cortés broke through a crowd surrounding the emperor's carriage and leaped upon the step.

"Who is this man?" demanded the indignant Charles.

"It is one," replied the marquis, fiercely, "who has given you more provinces than your ancestors left you cities!"

Still he went unrecognized, for more than twenty years had elapsed since the conquest

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of Mexico, and his day had ended. The months and the years went by, yet Cortés lingered, as tenacious of his rights as ever, his weakness consisting in an abject dependence upon his sovereign. He was never to receive another favor from that sovereign, but he resolved that Charles should not be allowed to forget his services. In the last of those famous letters to the emperor, written on February 3, 1544, he says: "I thought that, having labored in my youth, it would so profit me in my old age that I might have ease and rest; for now it is forty years that I have been occupied, with little sleep, eating ill, and sometimes neither well nor ill; in bearing armor, in placing my person in danger, in spending my estate and my life, all in the service of God; . . . also increasing and making broad the patrimony of my king—gaining for him and bringing under his yoke and royal sceptre many and very great kingdoms of barbarous nations, all won by my own person, and at my own expense, without being assisted in anything; on the contrary, being much hindered by many jealous and envious persons who, like leeches, have been filled to bursting with my blood!"

Nothing availed, however, to move the

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emperor, and three more years of hopeless waiting passed away. "The marquis was now grown old and he was worn down by fatigues; he was therefore very anxious to return to Mexico; but a treaty was on foot between his eldest daughter, for whom he had sent, and the son and heir to the marquis of Astorga." This marriage agreement was repudiated, and, broken in spirit, his pride deeply wounded, with the injustice of his sovereign rankling in his breast, he prepared to return to his home. During all these years of shameful neglect his faithful wife had awaited his return, his children at home had been without a father's care. Only his devoted son Martin, now a youth of fifteen, was with him when the end came, finally, when on his way to the coast. Beneath his accumulated misfortunes he sank rapidly, and passed away on December 2, 1547, at the age of sixty-two.

His mortal career ended at Castilleja, a suburb of Seville, whence he was borne to the tomb of the Medina Sidonias, followed by members of that ducal family, and the highest of the Andalusian nobility. He was entombed in the land of his birth; but this was not his last resting-place, for his remains,

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like those of Columbus (whose experience of the ingratitude of sovereigns was similar to his own), were finally taken to the country he had conquered by his sword.

Don Martin, his faithful son, returned to Mexico alone. He fell heir to his father's titles and properties, and, in accordance with the provisions of his last will and testament, the remains of the marquis were taken to Mexico and placed in the Franciscan monastery at Tezcoco, by the side of his mother and a daughter. This was in 1652. Sixty-seven years later they were transferred to the church of St. Francis, in the city of Mexico. On this occasion all the dignitaries of Mexico marched in procession through the streets of the city won by Cortés more than a century before. The revered relics were guarded by men in armor, Spanish cavaliers, and foot-soldiers carrying arquebuses, with trailing banners, reversed pikes, and muffled drums. Five generations pass away, and again, in 1794, we see the mouldering dust disturbed, when there was another removal to the hospital of Jesus. All that then remained of the great captain was placed in a crystal casket, above which was reared a monument adorned with a bust in bronze.

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These various removals had been inspired by regard; but it was a different sentiment that caused the next disturbance, in 1823, when a revolutionary mob, in order to show its detestation of the Spanish *conquistadores*, essayed to desecrate the tomb. The casket was secretly removed, in the dead of night, by the duke of Monteleone (a descendant of Cortés in the female line), and for more than seventy years remained in a place of safety, unknown save to a few. Monteleone was killed in a revolution, and all knowledge of the spot was lost; but within a few years the remains have been discovered, and a movement started to have them placed in the national pantheon, which Mexico has erected to all the great names in its history.

The male line from the marquis became extinct in the fourth generation, when title and estates passed by marriage to the ducal family of Monteleone, Neapolitan nobles. How nearly obliterated has become the line that Cortés founded is indicated in the mournful statement of its only survivor at the time the secret casket was discovered, "I am the sole descendant of Hernando Cortés, and when I die leave no posterity!"

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Thus in a breath we have a commentary on human greatness and renown; thus in a sentence is pronounced an epitaph of the family founded by Cortés the Conqueror.

THE END









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